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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Fictionalizing as Fiction-Analyzing: A Study of Select "Critical" Fiction by Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe

BY

Kofi Owusu ©

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF Doctor of Philosophy

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Fictionalizing as Fiction-Analyzing: A Study of Select "Critical" Fiction by Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe** submitted by **Kofi Owusu** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in **English**

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To the Memory of
Reynolds Kwame Okrah

Abstract

A reformulated version of an observation by Edmund Wilson in "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" strikes the keynote of this dissertation: "even when we think we do know [African literature], we may be surprised to return to [it] and find ...a [signification] of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than [that found in those treatises on 'cultural and religious conflicts,' 'tradition versus change,' 'proverbs,' and 'coups']." Focus on select fiction by Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe yields the conclusion that criticism and critical theory are better served if the critic pays more attention to the fiction's signifying depths than to surface details. The African novelist, conscious of his own experimenting bent in dealing with a "borrowed" genre in a "foreign" language, entertains the average reader with his story-telling/fictionalizing prowess at a primary level of signification; but undergirding that surface level is a secondary one at which the novelist "teaches" the informed reader to read/interpret him. At this secondary level of signification, the informed reader becomes the novelist's co-worker at fiction-analyzing.

An eclectic opening chapter on critical theory and methodology provides a framework for the ensuing chapters and a range of critical discourses which could invigorate, compete with or replace the monotonous langue of African literature criticism. Armah's novel about the Lisbon-trained-Portuguese-speaking Solo and the Harvard-trained-English-

speaking Modin, who meet in a newly-independent-French-speaking North African country, lends itself to the inquiry: "how should one read the African novel in Portuguese, English or French?" That question, posed in the second chapter, is echoed in the succeeding chapters on Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe. The concluding chapter brings insight gleaned from the preceding chapters into focus: the novels discussed have been shown to have "complicated reference[s] and...[deep] implication[s]," and it is such references and implications, given short shrift in the interpretation of the African novel to date, which the literary critic can no longer ignore. This study suggests and demonstrates the need for the next generation of critics to subscribe to "accent[s]" that "[fall] differently from of old."

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CHAPTER I

INTERPRETING INTERPRETATIONS OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

> It is important...to see both...literature and its criticism as a single activity, that is, both co-operating in the creation of a literary tradition. ...
>
> [C]riticism and the making of a literary work may be regarded as two sides of the same coin.... [T]he creative talent and the critical faculty coexist in the same person and may be regarded as identical.
>
> --D.S. Izevbaye, "Criticism and Literature in Africa"

> For post-colonial writers the current textual and theoretical revolution does not represent a "crisis of authority", but enables creativity and restitution. By refusing, realigning, deconstructing the "master narrative" of [W]estern history, by interrogating its tropes as well as its content, post-colonial writers have been and are recapturing notions of self from "other" and investigating that destructive binarism itself.
>
> --Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History"

1. A CRITIQUE OF CRITICISM AND CRITICAL THEORY*

> "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's."
> --William Blake, Jerusalem

> It is the responsibility of today's African intellectual...to avoid the conditioning of the social being by the mono-criterion methodology of Europe.
> --Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World

The epigraphs from Blake and Soyinka anticipate concerns that are addressed directly or implied in this chapter. William Blake's self-admonishing statement sums up the need for critics of African literature to "create...[critical] system[s]" or be swamped by neighboring ones. Wole Soyinka, in turn, provides a timely reminder that scholarship on African literature can do without the imposition of a "mono-criterion methodology." The ensuing pages offer an assessment of some systems and methodologies which underwrite interpretations of African literature. In the process, attention is directed to valuable insights provided by African literature and orature for criticism and critical theory. Although the focus of the entire dissertation is on select fiction by Ghanaian and Nigerian writers, it is implied that at least some of the issues raised and discussed, particularly in this chapter, would have implications for the African novel and for African literature within the larger context of Black literatures.

---

* A version of this [first] part of the chapter has been accepted for publication in Black American Literature Forum under the title "Interpreting Interpreting."

Interpreters of African literature are not always sure of what exactly they are interpreting. Indeed, received readings of African texts promote the strange notion that the link between the two terms that comprise "African literature" is a tenuous one. Those who emphasize "African" tend to ignore the "literature," and if the emphasis falls on "literature" the "African" is blacked out. I look for "Africanness"--not so much a geographical category as an essence, a mode of perception, a particular point of view--in the term "African," for "literariness"--rather than the informative anthropological imperative, for instance--in the term "literature," and I foreground the link between the two terms. (References to James Joyce and Charles Dickens, for example, in this study are predicated upon the assumption that one could, but the literary critic does not, read these writers primarily for "information" about Dubliners and Londoners.) In this chapter, and in the ones that follow it, "African literature" signifies the fusion of a general literary category ("literature") and the particularity of "a metaphysical landscape...a view of the world and of the whole cosmos perceived from [an 'African'] position."[1] Since more than enough attention has already been paid to "Western 'influences'" on African literature, this dissertation emphasizes the interdependence of African literature and orature and, wherever appropriate, draws attention to affinities with

Afro-American literature. Where the comparative approach is warranted there will be a complementing focus on intertextuality rather than "influence."

Discourse on discourses

Criticism of African literature has come a long way since the 1962 Conference on African Literature held in Kampala. The tendency then, as Omafume Onoge reminds us, was to admonish African writers to move away from the emphasis on "public gesture" and the "situation of the Negro" and concentrate, rather, on the "private" and the "particular."[2] The last two decades have seen the broadening of the scope of criticism. The interest displayed by critics and writers alike in the Africanness of "African" and the literariness of the "literature" has tended to generate a corresponding sensitivity to the relationship of African literature studies to neighboring systems. And these processes have yielded a couple of broad critical stances which, fundamentally, complement each other. On the one hand, Henry Gates, Jr. notes that "the texts of the black canon occupy a rhetorical space in at least two canons, as does black literary theory" while, on the other, Anthony Appiah points out that "[i]t is not necessary to show that African literature is...the same as European literature in order to show that it can be treated with the same tools."[3] The implications of these complementing stances are being worked out with varying degrees of sophistication and commitment in contemporary criticism of African/Black literatures.

The link that Gates establishes between "texts of the black canon" and "black literary theory" redresses, by addressing, an imbalance which becomes abundantly clear below. The implied suggestion that separating literary criticism from literary theory is "a dubious contention"[4] provides the basis for my observation that the apparent disjunction of (literary or scholarly) criticism and literary theory has had a negative impact on the interpretation of African literature. The set of sponsoring systems of a good number of critical discourses on African literature is not always apparent. On those occasions when a model is advertised, the perceptive reader is usually left with the impression that there is little substance beyond the packaging.

The presentation of what Georg Gugelberger describes as "the main tendencies of post-independence African criticism" --"Larsonist cristics"[sic], "African Euro-centric critics," "Bolekaja critics," "Ogunist critics," and "Marxist critics"[5] --does not go beyond name-dropping. These Gugelbergerian "tendencies" turn out to be built around hand-picked critics about whom the word "main" is certainly a misnomer. It is also obvious that Gugelberger's categorizations are misleading. For example, on "Larsonist [critics]" he writes: "Larsony [is what] Ayi Kwei Armah has called [the] phenonomenon of European critics who write on African literature and constantly compare it to European literature. Critics such as Larson, Palmer, Roscoe and others" (p. 11). It must be a very desperate critic who would, indeed, insist on turning a short essay, "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction," with a specific stated intent--

> I propose to examine some of the expert pronouncements of...Charles Larson.
>
> ....
>
> In my appraisal I shall restrict myself to those of Larson's expert pronouncements...on my work and person[6]

--into a "main [tendency] of post-independence African criticism." Worse still, Gugelberger apparently believes that Eustace Palmer is European. He is not. And that error subverts his other "tendency" ("African Euro-centric critics") to which, on his own terms, Palmer should belong. These local problems of convenient rather than accurate categorizations, misleading generalizations, and factual errors are symptoms of a larger problem. The collection of essays in Gugelberger's Marxism and African Literature (1986) is supposed to be derived from, and governed by, Marxist/Marxian theory; but what is actually the case is that the title, which advertises a sponsoring aesthetic, serves as a convenient eye-catching rhetorical ploy to promote essays which, in the main, are patently uncertain about their critical and theoretical assumptions.

In the introduction to his collection, Gugelberger boldly announces that it "brings together for the first time a significant number of radical essays on African literature"; but the relationship, if any, between radicalism and critical discourses is not explored. The "radical" critic goes on to suggest the expansion of "the concept of Third World literature in truly international solidarity to include such writers as William Blake, Bertolt Brecht and others" (p. v). Six pages later, that suggestion forms the basis for the "[feeling] that the Christian Ngugi is rather a Blakean Ngugi and that Blake and Brecht...can be seen as revolutionary precursors of the famous Kenyan novelist." The problem with such "radical" ideas is that the reader is expected to take all the "Christian Ngugi...Blakean Ngugi" stuff from the sponsoring perspective of Marxism which the critic himself characterizes as "class conscious and anti-metaphysical"(p. 5). Gugelberger's Marxism and African Literature, like Emmanuel Ngara's "study of the influence of Marxism on African writing," Art and Ideology in the African Novel (1985), promises more than it delivers. Although Ngara avoids some of the sweeping generalizations in Gugelberger's collection, one gets the impression, nonetheless, that in both cases the reader is offered formulaic repetition of "class struggle," "progressive ideology," "dialectics," "comprador class," "imperialist finance capital," and so on, without any profound insight into Marxist/Marxian literary theory, on the one hand, and African literature, on the other. The real issues, namely, the interaction of Marxist aesthetics with culture-specific African texts and the resultant perspectival adjustments necessitated by the negotiation of rhetorical strategies, are postponed indefinitely. For Gugelberger and Ngara, African literature appears to be no more than tropical grist for an imported ideological mill.

Emmanuel Ngara offered the reading public his views on "stylistic criticism" before embarking on his "Art and Ideology" project. And in the former, as in the latter, there is a profound inadequacy at the all-important juncture where a particular model or framework is tested against specific (African) texts. The earlier work is the source of another problem. The critic's brand of linguistics and stylistics in Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel (1982) suffers from a needless commitment to an undefined "Standard English" as some sort of infallible yardstick with which linguistic registers and stylistic manifestations are measured. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for instance, is praised because according to Ngara he "uses Standard English and uses it well" (p. 97) in A Grain of Wheat. And, predictably, Gabriel Okara's linguistic experimentation in The Voice is reduced to this:

> The simplicity and un-Englishness of the language is [sic] what the reader notices first. In the first paragraph, Okara's language sounds like the English of a schoolboy who has not yet mastered the language. (p. 39)

The joke is on the critic for Okara is, in fact, in "good" company. James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov, two of the best known prose stylists in the Euro-American canon, readily come to mind. In the "Circe" section of Joyce's Ulysses, "The Fan" (Circe's wand) wonders:

> Is me her was you dreamed before?
> Was then she him you us since knew?
> Am all them and the same now we?[7]

And in Lolita this is what Humbert Humbert tells the reader about "wrestling" with Clare Quilty:

> I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us.[8]

All one really needs to do is to compare these excerpts from the paroles of Joyce and Nabokov with Okara's "schoolboyish" parole in The Voice to come to the conclusion that it is the function, not the sheer instance, of seeming "un-Englishness" that matters in the language of the fiction cited.

Sunday Anozie's Structural Models and African Poetics (1981) and, on a smaller scale, Kenneth Harrow's "The Poetics of African Littérature de Témoignage" (in African Literature Studies: The Present State [1985]) represent a sample of other--altogether rather few--instances in which prominence has been given to critical discourses as the object of study. It is, as yet, not clear to me how far Harrow's "poetics" can go. What is not in doubt is that periodization, a discernible thematic thrust, and "a literary call to action" (p. 148) constitute an interesting stabilizing ballast for Harrow's "poetics." Anthony Appiah's review-essay, "Strictures on Structures," points out serious shortcomings in Anozie's Structural Models and African Poetics. Appiah identifies "a fundamental problem" which applies as much to Anozie, Gugelberger and Ngara, in particular, as it does to critics of African literature in general:

> [W]e should not expect the transfer of a method to a new set of texts to lead to exactly the same results....indeed, this would surely _show_ that there was something wrong with the method. (p. 145)

There is, in fact, no reason to suppose that structuralism's methodology cannot do service for "a range of disciplines from anthropology to mathematics."[9] And Uri Margolin, for example, had good reason to propose that we "regard structuralism as a methodological paradigm for hermeneutics, in the same way that linguistics was for structural poetics in its turn."[10] To say that structuralism is relevant to "African poetics" as Anozie does, then, is really not saying anything profoundly original; but the potential is there for Anozie to make a contribution to both the sponsoring system, structuralism, and the interpretation of African literature. The very versatility of structuralism lends credibility to Colin Mercer's contention in "Paris Match" that structuralism is not as "unified, consistent and 'complete'" (p. 44) a body of theory as it is usually presented. Structuralism has been known for some time to be more than ripe for a significant "s"--_structuralisms_. Sunday Anozie's peremptory nationalization of "imported" models is not called for: his "structural models" must be allowed to feel their way through the necessary transformation in their encounter with African texts.

The "pragmatics" of such an encounter could yield infra-models that are directly applicable to African literature and related to, even informed by, other text-specific structuralisms. "In the 'application' of a mode of reading to black texts," writes Gates, "the critic, by definition, transforms the theory and...received readings...into something different, a construct neither exactly 'like' its antecedent nor entirely new."[11] Gates's apposite observations, a variation on Anthony Appiah's, underline Anozie's realizable potential and his limitations to date.

The shortcomings which have been highlighted in the foregoing point to the dearth of relevant meta-meta-discourses, on the one hand, and account for the effusiveness of disparate meta-discourses, on the other. The confusions, controversies and acrimonious debates engendered by these disparate critical essays are in large measure traceable to the absence of, or uncertainty about, informing models. It is also generally true that uncertainty about informing models could be as limiting as the premature certainty which leads critics like Georg Gugelberger to advocate what amounts to a literary ideology:

> Looking at the African scene from a Marxist perspective obviously [means] two things: encouragement and recognition for those who have started writing in this tradition, but at the same time a warning that African specificity (race/Africaneity) cannot any longer be privileged concepts [sic] once progressive internationalist positions are taken. (MAL, p. vii)

I fail to see the point about the critic of African literature who needs "encouragement and recognition" for "writing in [a] tradition" which does away with "African specificity." Nor do I share the strange assumption that a particular "perspective" has to replace others on "the African scene" precisely because it gives no privilege to what is "African." "African specificity" is not marginalized in this chapter and in the dissertation as a whole. I refer to Euro-American sources partly to provide contrasting perspectives, but mainly to suggest that the culture-specificity of African (literary) experiences does not preclude either alignment to or comparison with non-African models.

The comparative principle is important to the sections that follow this one. In drawing attention to some African and Afro-American "roots" of signification and deconstruction, one is suggesting that tedious treatises on "influence" could be refined out of existence by comparative and intertextual analyses. Since those "roots" are, in the main, embedded in orality and oral sources are known to feed much of Black literature, I refer to select texts which celebrate the speaking voice, and go on to deal with the question: what bearing do Euro-American communication and reader-response theories, for example, have on such texts? The comparativism which such a question elicits is applied to the act of interpretation and then discussed explicitly [on its own terms]. Undergirding these discussions is the re-affirmation of those terms that, for the purpose of this chapter [and dissertation], allow for comparative and intertextual studies: the "specificity" of Black-Africanness linked to the "universality" of literariness.

Signification and Deconstruction: From Roots to Fruits

The Afro-American "Signifying Monkey" shares significantly close qualities with the Akan-Asante [signifying-] trickster, Kwaku Ananse. I disagree with Kwawisi Tekpetey's suggestion in his "The Trickster in Akan-Asante Oral Literature" that "Kwaku Ananse" translates into "the Spider," though I appreciate the distinction his translation makes between "a spider" and "the Spider." Ananse has a kradin--a compound of ɔkra (soul) and din (name), kradin is "soul name." Human beings have "soul-names" because it is believed that they, unlike spiders, have souls. Ananse's kradin, Kwaku, suggests that he belongs to legend. But, as Tekpetey rightly reminds us,

> Kwaku Ananse seems to have existed from the beginning of things.... He is equally indestructible for we never hear of the death of Ananse. He seems to be of supernatural origin related to 'Nyame,' the Sky-god.[12]

As "supernatural" being, Kwaku Ananse belongs to myth. The English word "spider" is ill-equipped to capture the essence of the legendary-mythical, "well-known literary figure" (p. 78) Kwaku Ananse. The everyday ananse translates into the English "spider"; Kwaku Ananse is untranslatable.

What Tekpetey describes as Kwaku Ananse's proverbial "keen intellect" and his eminence as "a clever deceiver, a master-scheemer[sic] and a mischief-maker"(pp. 78, 80) find expression in verbal adroitness. This verbal dexterity, in turn, derives from the [signifying-]trickster's awareness, and systematic manipulation, of the "arbitrariness" of the linguistic sign. As a result of their dogmatic adherence to a "natural" rather than "conventional" or "arbitrary" relationship between "the signified idea" and "the signifying word,"[13] Kwaku Ananse's literal-minded antagonists are usually seen trapped in linguistic prison-houses while the protagonist is left free to explore the open fields of language. In foregrounding the "arbitrariness" of the sign while society insists on the cultural necessity of an inbred "natural" bond, Kwaku Ananse gains, first, his reputation as "a breaker of taboos" who operates in a context which "seems to lack reference" and, second, his symbolic significance as "a spirit of revolt against the rigidity and tyranny of tradition" (Tekpetey, pp. 79, 81).

What is true of Kwaku Ananse's verbal adroitness is also true, in general, of those performances in the oral tradition which demand verbal dexterity. The traditional Song of Abuse, Halo, of the Ewes (of West Africa), for example, is as much a play of "giants" of rhetoric as it is a play of signifiers. When the halo poet, Amega Dunyo, dares his antagonist--a whore--to

> Come and hear the voice of slander.
> You clutch the earth like a leather bag.

> You run like the bush rope.
> Your back caves in rising like the hillock.
> Beneath your stomach is the hyaena's ravine....
> Will this too insult the poet?[14]

neither the poet himself, the opposing party, nor the audience looks for a "transcendent signified" in each instance of signification. This is because addresser, addressee, and audience operate with a generic code to which the act of signifying is itself paramount. The same code is invoked in Ayi Kwei Armah's parody of the Song of Praise in Two Thousand Seasons:

> We took turns composing, took turns singing the
> most extravagant praise songs to Kamuzu's vanity.
> ...What spurious praise names did we not invent
> to lull Kamuzu's buffoon spirit?
> Osagyefo!
> Kantamanto!
> Kabiyesi!
> Sese!
> Mwenyenguvu!
> Otumfuo![15]

There is nothing but "sound and fury" to these praise names; they "[signify] nothing" precisely because the context emphasizes the "unnaturalness" and, thus, the "arbitrariness," of the relationship between signifier and signified, sign and referent. The cultural necessity of a "natural" bond is hinted at only to be emphatically denied.

If I have not as yet mentioned by name the rare breed of notes-taking, super students who contributed a Saussurean "Course in General Linguistics" to Euro-American literary theory, it is because I do not believe that Saussure and his students could have possibly "influenced" the Akan-Asante

Kwaku Ananse or the Afro-American Signifying Monkey. And I want to make explicit what is implied in the Shakespearean echo in the preceding paragraph. It is conceivable that any number of Macbeths, who "see" "Birnam wood...come to Dunsinane" and learn that a person who is "from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" is not necessarily "of a woman born," must have "lived" through the implications of theses like "[t]he linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept [*signifié*] and a sound-image [*signifiant*]"; and "*the linguistic sign is arbitrary*."[16] "A tale / ..., full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" is a tale whose sound-images ("signifiers") are not tied to concepts ("signifieds"). The "idiot" who told that tale reappears in the brave new [post-modern] Euro-American world as an emblem for the "'insanity' of true genius."

> Within the Black tradition one may very well find it
>
> curious...that this neologism in the Western tradition [signification] is a homonym of a term in the black vernacular tradition that is approximately two centuries old. Tales of the Signifying Monkey had their origins in slavery; hundreds of these tales have been recorded since the nineteenth century. In black music, Jazz Gillum, Count Basie, Oscar Peterson,...Nat King Cole, Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Johnny Otis--among others--have recorded songs called either 'The Signifying Monkey' or, simply, 'Signifyin(g).'...Signification is a theory of reading that arises from Afro-American culture; learning how 'to signify' is often part of our adolescent education.[17]

If one were to follow the trace of the roots of African-American[18] culture to their original African roots, one would have to add centuries to "approximately two centuries." Thus, there are good reasons why I am not particularly excited by the thrust of those aspects of Saussurean linguistics that are potentially "relevant" to what Sunday Anozie calls "African poetics." Those same reasons undermine, in a more general than particular way, the potency of Saussure's "seminal" theses for my purpose.[19] I am interested, rather, in the kinds of probing which could contribute to the shift in the focus of criticism from the "influence" of something Euro-American on somebody Black-African to meaningful comparative and intertextual studies. In the meantime, one can hardly do better than emphasize the inevitable qualifications and discriminations that have to be made in relating various Euro-American theoretical and critical positions to African literature and orature.

The correspondences between identifiable segments of Saussurean theses and the broad features of [post-]Derridean deconstructionism, on the one hand, and Kwaku Ananse's free-play of signification, on the other, are not far-fetched. Nor is the deconstructive disposition, in fact, foreign to post-colonial African literature. Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Fragments, and The Dilemma of a Ghost, to take the most obvious examples, all employ rhetorical strategies that subvert the claims of the language system(s) they use and, at one and the same time, affirm as well as undermine received generic codes. The thematic and rhetorical centers of these representative texts "cannot hold"; the chaos of the represented world (the signified) is traced at and by the signifying plane of expression. The "[m]ere anarchy [that] is loosed upon the world" of fiction or drama as a result, is the anarchy of contradiction, indeterminacy, paradox and undecidability. This, for example, is how Ama Ata Aidoo's play, The Dilemma of a Ghost, ends:

> Shall I go to Cape Coast?
> Shall I go to Elmina?
> I can't tell
> Shall I?
> I can't tell
> I can't tell
> I can't tell
> I can't tell....

In a play which dramatizes "the dilemma" of the ghost of the protagonist's former self, the build-up is appropriately toward a climactic undecidability. In effect, we are dealing with a variation on that brand of "learned" anarchy--to which aporia is integral--sponsored by deconstructionists in the Euro-American canon. "A variation on" because it should be understood that in African literature and orature undecidability and/or "irreconcilable paradox" (aporia) do(es) not necessarily translate into Derridean de-centering. The mythology that supports the legendary-mythical Kwaku Ananse is also partial to the ordinary, everyday web-spinning ananse/spider. The latter connotes centering; but the former, Kwaku Ananse, spins webs which are more literary than literal and emblematizes the deconstructive impulse apparent in African literature and orature.

"Textspeak" and the Black "Speakerly" Text

In writing about African literature one finds oneself almost inevitably making references to oral sources for the simple reason that the vibrant oral tradition feeds the literature. There was a time when Western essayists/critics, in particular, routinely associated orality with non-literate "primitivism." In recent times, however, a good number of critics in the Euro-American tradition have been asking fundamental questions about Literature and, in the process, have arrived at a better understanding of the history and nature of their own literature in relation to other literatures. Oral and written forms are not, and have never really been, discontinuous: certainly not to the African. The universal applicability of the insistence by Albert Lord and Walter Ong, for example, that the "'literary' and [the] 'oral' remain antithetical terms" is suspect.[20] René Wellek and Austin Warren, by contrast, survey a broader area of knowledge and provide better insight:

> One of the objections to 'literature' is its suggestion...of limitation to written or printed literature; for, clearly, any coherent conception must include 'oral literature.' In this respect, the German term Wortkunst and the Russian slovesnost have the advantage over their English equivalent.[21]

Recent developments on the Euro-American literary scene indicate that the "super" systems of communication theory and speech-act theory are providing much-needed nourishment to various sub-systems that restore preeminence to speech and emphasize the priority of "voice" over "discourse." Uri Margolin notes

> In this context the significant convergence between communication theory and the recent schools of neo-rhetoric in the United States and Belgium, for example. This...is not surprising, since Rhetoric... has always regarded the literary work as an act of communication in which textual strategies are deliberately employed by the author in order to elicit responses and reactions of specific kinds in the receiver.[22]

Harold Bloom's perspective on the subject is instructive. In A Map of Misreading, Bloom warns readers of "the humanistic loss we sustain if we yield up the authority of oral tradition to the partisans of writing...like Derrida and Foucault."[23] The priority of the spoken word over the written word is buttressed by a complementary positing of a primal "Scene of Instruction" over the "Scene of Writing." The latter point is made explicit later on in Bloom's Map when he writes about "a peculiarly American re-centering...that ...follows Emerson in valorizing eloquence, the inspired voice, over the scene of writing" (p. 176).[24]

Margolin's observations and Bloom's statements remind me of what I have always taken for granted about African literature and its informing oral sources. Bloom's text, in particular, yields some verbal echoes which the critic of African literature might find interesting. "Valorizing eloquence, the inspired voice, over the scene of writing" gets to the heart of Ayi Kwei Armah's experimental linguistic and textual strategies in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. Ano[w]a's "inspired voice" eloquently carries out the responsibility of story-telling in the latter novel:

> But now this tongue of the story-teller, descendant of masters in the arts of eloquence, this tongue flies too fast for the listener.
>
> ....
>
> Let the listener know when. Let the listener know where. Then, Ano[w]a tongue, born for eloquence, continue your telling.[25]

Similarly, foregrounding both the power of the spoken word and the "Scene of Instruction" is central to Gabriel Okara's The Voice:

> 'Nobody withstands the power of the spoken word. Okolo has spoken. I will speak when the time is correct and others will follow and our spoken words will gather power like the power of a hurricane and Izongo will sway and fall like sugar cane.... Our words will have power when we speak them out.'[26]

The Voice, Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers make no apologies for their indebtedness to indigenous oral sources. Okara and Armah carry discernible trends in African literature to their logical conclusion. Within the Black tradition, these writers have created fiction which Henry Gates, Jr. describes in "The Blackness of Blackness" as

> [s]peakerly texts [which] privilege the representation of the speaking black voice, of what the Russian Formalists called skaz and which Hurston and Reed have called 'an oral book, a talking book.' (p. 296)

The story-teller in Armah's The Healers is a "descendant of masters in the arts of eloquence"[my emphasis] because s/he belongs to, and is continuing, a tradition of eloquent "speaking" for the benefit of appreciative "listener[s]." Armah and Okara celebrate what the latter describes as "'the power of the spoken word.'" Both writers "privilege the representation of the speaking black voice": the [self-] conscious colloquialism makes The Voice and The Healers "speaking" texts ("'oral book[s],... talking book[s]'"). Armah's "speaking" text, like Okara's, engages in a dialogue with itself and with the Other; it says something to the ["listening"] Other ("Let the listener know when. Let the listener know where"). The "speaking" text, then, speaks to something with somebody in mind without "the humanistic loss" Harold Bloom is anxious about.

When Henry Gates uses the expression "speakerly texts," I understand him to be underlining the centrality of "speaker" and "the spoken word" in the Russian genre skaz and in "'an oral book, a talking book.'" Additionally, the term "speakerly" recalls, because it is meant to be contradistinguished from, Roland Barthes's "writerly" and "readerly" [texts]. Barthes defines the terms "writerly" and "readerly" in his S/Z. To Barthes, "evaluation" is "linked ...to a practice...of writing." Consequently, the critic is concerned with "what can be written (rewritten)...: the writerly" and "its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the readerly."[27] The "writerly" text makes "the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" and posits

> the image of a triumphant plural.... [T]his text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable. (pp. 5-6)

"Readerly" texts, on the other hand, "are products (and not productions)" (p. 5); they are "characterized by the pitiless divorce...between the producer of the text and its user, between...[the] author and [the] reader" (p. 4); and they are "determinable" to the extent that they are "committed to the closure system" (p. 7). The "readerly" text is synonymous with "a circle...in which 'everything holds together'" (p. 156).

It is apparent from the foregoing that the exclusivity of Barthes's commitment to "what can be written (rewritten)" --an example of what Wole Soyinka describes as "the mono-criterion methodology of Europe"[28]--is at odds with Gates's "speakerly" critical theorizing, the practice of Armah and Okara, and the general theoretical orientation and practice of either Zora Neale Hurston or Ishmael Reed. In Armah's The Healers, for example, there is no "pitiless divorce" between the story-teller and the listener as postulated in Barthes's "readerly" discourse. Nor does Armah sustain the image posited by the "writerly" text that the listener (Barthes's "reader") is the "producer of the text." The story-teller/ author and the listener/reader complement each other in The

Healers without any prior insistence that the listener/reader proves himself through a galactic-vertiginous, "writerly" test. I am, therefore, inclined to the conclusion that the Black-African text, like Okara's or Armah's, which "privilege[s] the representation of the speaking black voice"--a text which Gates characterizes as "speakerly," "which Hurston and Reed have called 'an oral book, a talking book,'" and which I, following Hurston, Reed and Gates, refer to as "speaking" [text]--in effect, neither subscribes to the dogmatic determinacy of the "readerly" text nor aligns itself with the "writerly" text's free-playing indeterminacy.

The readiness with which critics have made or been making the transition from "work [of art]" to "literary text" complements the increased attention being paid to the reader's response to or reception of "texts." In recent Euro-American critical theory, the term "text" itself, as Hans Jauss indicates, presupposes "an actualization by a reader as its very mode of existence."[29] If the reader is a complementing participant in text-making and the text itself could be regarded as an act of communication, then the reader, like Armah's "listener," comes into his own. These observations are reflected in Serge Doubrovsky's:

> 'Through the written text or the acted play, through the beauty of the words or the rigor of the construction, a man is speaking of man to men. The aesthetic object, in this regard, constitutes simply a particular case of interhuman relations, a special mode of confrontation with the Other.'[30]

In traditional as well as modern societies, in orature as in literature, the African [male] artist has always seen himself as "a man...speaking to men." Even when the artist speaks for or on behalf of his people--as when he attempts, within the confines of art, to give expression to a communal or collective consciousness--the reader still gets the sense of "a man...speaking of [M]an to men." There is, thus, a deep seated inclination based on local tradition to regard the relationship between story-tellers and listeners, actors/performers and audience, and between authors and readers as one of creative symbiosis: the aesthetic experience informs the aesthetics of art. For the purposes of criticism and critical theory, this is what makes African literature "a shared experience." (I have already alluded to "shared experience" in a literal sense: the sense in which authors like Achebe, Ngugi and Armah, for example, create fiction out of the raw material of experiences that are collective or communal and are therefore literally "shared.")[31]

It is regrettable that the critical-theoretical dimension of the "shared experience" model has not been sufficiently explored. There are, for example, two main problems with the Selected Proceedings from the 1977 African Literature Association Meeting, Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience (eds. Richard Priebe and Thomas Hale). First, "shared experience" seems to have been discussed in sociological and anthropological, rather than literary, terms. In their inadequately brief introduction to the text, the editors reproduce Daniel Kunene's quotation from Goody and Watt:

> 'In non-literate society every social situation cannot but bring the individual into [conflict] with the group's patterns of thought, feelings and action: the choice is between cultural tradition--or solitude.'

Kunene offers this excerpt approvingly, and Priebe and Hale are apparently impressed by it. And so, as it turns out, it is not the creative symbiosis involving artist and audience that defines "shared experience," but a piece of questionable, and certainly by the 1970s already outdated, anthropological datum. Given this anthropological bias, one is not really surprised to note, secondly, that Artist and Audience lacks aesthetic-philosophic backbone. One would have thought that the prominence given to "audience" and "shared experience" could not but lead to a discussion of comparative perspectives on theories of reception, reader-response and aesthetic experience. An excellent opportunity for critics of African literature and orature to speak for what is "African" in relation to neighboring systems was, in this instance, unfortunately missed.

The "speakerly" text assumes the primacy of the reader's response based on the prototypical, shared [text-making] experience of the "call" of the speaking (or singing) voice and the "response" of the listening audience.[32] We note also that the assumptions that underwrite "speakerly" texts equally underpin critical theories and schools of thought which regard the literary text as both "an act of communication" and as "tissue." Since the root of the term "text" is traceable to texere ("tissue"; "to weave," "plait"), it is revealing to observe that ideas like the literary text is "tissue" and that text-making translates into weaving and interweaving are similarly rooted in African oral tradition. Such ideas find expression in the constant references to images of the web and of weaving. Both images reappear in African literature as artistic paradigms. The writer of imaginative literature is understood to be involved in an incessant interweaving of narrative threads, strands of thought, and tissues of "lies." The thread is the recurring image in Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat:

> Warui looked at the hearthplace.... 'We of Thabai Village must also dance our part....' Silence followed these words.... The woman [Wambui] cleared her throat, an indication that she was about to take up the thread from Warui.[33]

"The thread," in this instance as elsewhere, is the narrative thread; but this thread can only be as long and as thick or thin as the thread of the lives and circumstances of the fictional characters who inhabit the fictional world:

> Six years later, it was the image of the thread that still appealed most to Gikonyo's imagination.
> ....
> He only wanted to see his Mumbi and take up the thread of life where he had left it.
> ....
> And who had thought of life as a thread one could continue weaving into a pattern of one's choice? (pp. 91, 98, 100)

By contrast, it is the images of "fabric" and "coil" which Abdulrazak Gurnah brings to the forefront in his short story "Bossy." The narrator tells the reader of a story he told a friend:

> A long story I told him, urbane and wise, a fabric of lies. I told him of a man who stood by the sea and peed, and how his pee was continuous without end. Like the tongue of infinite length, all coiled up in a man's insides.[34]

The narrator's "long story" is a "tall" one; we do not believe it. A man whose "pee was continuous without end" can only exist in fiction. The narrator, like the author, is not only telling the reader "a fabric of lies"; he is also keen on emphasizing the intentional falsity of his lies, the fictionality of his fiction. Yet another author, Leonard Kibera, underlines the telling, the very process of fictionalizing, by appealing to the traditional image of the spider perpetually spinning its web: his short story is significantly entitled "The Spider's Web." And we note that Kibera's web does have a centering spider: "a subtle web, at the centre of which lurked the spider."[35]

The imagery of spinning, weaving and interweaving is not the exclusive preserve of African writers like Ngugi and Kibera. The Roland Barthes of The Pleasure of the Text, for example, relates his notion of the "Text" to "Tissue" and "the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving."[36] What is different is the position of the spider in the metaphoric scheme of things.

Kibera's centering spider foregrounds a metaphor of presence which contrasts sharply with its absence in representative Euro-American imaginative and critical literature. The "portrait" of James Joyce's "artist," for instance, recalls "the God of the creation" who is "invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." This Joycean/Euro-American artist is like a spider that has disappeared from its web. Northrop Frye echoes Joyce's "God of the creation" image in his Anatomy of Criticism: "creation, whether of God, man, or nature, seems to be an activity whose only intention is to abolish intention."[37] And Frank Lentricchia has, since Frye's Anatomy, used the image of a "web without a centering spider" as a metaphoric correlative to Euro-American post-structuralist and deconstructionist endeavors, in general, and Derridean de-centering, in particular:

> As sheer interweaving, as web without a centering spider, free-play without closure, endless galaxy of liberated signifiers, the text destroys itself as veil, lens, or mirror--and unburdens itself of the cognitive weight that...traditional epistemological metaphors are meant to bear.[38] [emphasis added]

A significant distinction is observable between Joyce-Frye-[Lentricchia]-Derrida-Euro-American "sheer interweaving,... [a] web without a centering spider," on the one hand, and Ngugi-Kibera-African incessant (rather than "sheer") interweaving, a web with (not "without") a centering spider, on the other. This distinction has implications for contrasting critical and theoretical perspectives.

If the literary text can be seen as "an act of communication," then as an act, in contradistinction to an event, of communication, one is enjoined by the speech-act analogy to reassert the paramountcy of intentionality. "Re-assert" because the anti-intentionalism apparent in Frye's Anatomy ("creation...seems to be an activity whose only intention is to abolish intention"), for instance, has strong support and powerful sponsors in the Euro-American canon. It is the strengh of this support and the extent of the sponsorship that have made E.D. Hirsch, Jr. feel the need to "[defend] ...the author" (the metaphoric spider) and to assert and re-assert his critical position on intentionality in Validity in Interpretation (1967) and The Aims of Interpretation (1976). African orature and literature and their criticism do not stand in need of any such reassertion for, to revert to the web image, it has always been understood that the spider spins as much as the human being thinks and speaks, not the other way round. What African literature needs are critics who are sufficiently sensitized to those elements in the African literary experience that could very well form the bases for critical theories of African literature[s]. We turn next to the critic and the politics of interpretation.

Atavistic Methodologies and the Politics of Interpretation

As one recalls, for example, the tempestuous "outdooring" of Joyce's Ulysses and Nabokov's Lolita--texts which elicited initial damaging criticism from literal-minded early reviewers who saw as much "pornography" in them as a number of critics see "anthropology" in African literature --and both texts' subsequent elevation to canonized status, one simultaneously underlines the critic's potential to "unmake" as well as "make" ("good" or "bad") literature. Writers in the Euro-American tradition have, for good reason, acknowledged or been forced to acknowledge the indispensability of the critic's role. Prefatory and/or postcriptive remarks provide an opportunity for the writer-as-critic to engage in a dialogue of sorts with the prospective critic-interpreter. Henry James's prefaces, for instance, have been, as one would expect, indispensable to critics. A variation on the theme is played out in Joyce's "schema" for *Ulysses*. Moreover, those who are not too sure of what is going on in *Finnegans Wake* may be dumb because the *Wake* is, in fact, an elaborate professorial "game." Mr. Joyce himself says so. And the force of irony does not succeed in blunting the keen edge of this Joycean metalinguistic adjudication. What is good for James and Joyce works well for Joseph Conrad. A case in point is the sub-title of *The Secret Agent*, "A Simple Tale," which is certainly intended to be ironic; but the irony here is not divorceable from the ironic reading which the text itself solicits. Furthermore, since the "germ" of Conrad's story is the actual attempt to blow up Greenwich Observatory in 1894, the generic code implied in "tale" signals the proscription of any one-to-one correspondence with actual historical event and persons. (Those who enjoy reading Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities must feel an aesthetic thrill down their literary spines when they come to The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale.)

Like Ulysses and Lolita, texts of imaginative literature, in the main, are neither "literary" nor "successful" in and by themselves: they "[become] so." This point is significant enough for my purpose to warrant amplification:

> A text 'is not literary but becomes so; . . this means that the reader's function is fundamental. Before his intervention the text is only a text; the literary object begins to exist only with him and thanks to his attention.'[39]

Basically, "literature" is what critics and their criticism say it is. Authors are aware of this, and those instances of metalinguistic adjudication or intervention referred to are a function of their anxiety that they be read as close to "correctly" as the nature of imaginative literature would allow. Given the modest reputation of the average African writer, his use of European languages, and the imperative to publish his work abroad, he has been particularly anxious to ensure that his work is neither routinely co-opted by neighboring traditions nor consigned to non-literary categories because the work does not fall faithfully within well-known --usually, Euro-American--literary conventions. J.P. Clark speaks for the African writer when he remarks that "critics have not so much concerned themselves with what our novelists have done to their derived form as with the amount of traditional ritual and modern rottenness and rheum that is to be found in them."[40] The usual reply to such remarks translates into something like "'Go back to your [sty], pig. What do you know about bacon?'"[41] It is unfortunate, then, that the privileged reader of African literature, the critic, leaves so much to be desired.

If we were to isolate a few defining characteristics of our hypothetical critic, they would be sheer timidity and literal-mindedness. This critic is the blind man in Bernth Lindfors's essay "The Blind Men and the Elephant." Lindfors introduces his essay with this version of a well known story:

> There is a famous story about six blind men encountering an elephant for the first time. Each man, seizing on the single feature of the animal which he happened to have touched first, and being incapable of seeing it whole, loudly maintained his limited opinion on the nature of the beast. The elephant was variously like a wall, a spear, a snake, a tree, a fan or a rope, depending on whether the blind man had first grasped the creature's side, tusk, trunk, knee, ear or tail.[42]

While this parable says a lot about the worst type of unmotivated and uninformed critic, it has little to say about the critic's informed response to a literary text. The critic who merits his name strives to see the textual monster whole, no matter how "loose," "baggy" or "elephantine" it turns out to be. In life, one is more often than not surprised by the versatility, zeal and motivation of blind persons. And in literature, what we know of characters as far apart as Tiresias and Ayi Kwei Armah's Naana makes us read "blindness" as a special kind of "seeing." The informed reader is not surprised to find Naana (in _Fragments_) blind, articulate, and in possession of prophetic vision and insight. Her blindness signifies, through metonymic extension, those compensatory "gifts." Lindfors's timid, blind men are without any compensating qualities. Trapped in their single- and literal-mindedness, these blind men have little to recommend them. What has been giving students of African literature nightmares is the observation that literal- and single-mindedness have already formed the bases for approaches to, and perspectives on, the study of African literature.

"Approach," "perspective," and "nightmare" characterize Wilhelm Dilthey's rendition of the blind-men-and-the-elephant story in terms of "methodological perspectivism." Hirsch's concern with the "perspectival implications of the word 'approach'"[43] leads him to recount Dilthey's "story of a nightmare that visited him sometime after he had begun to use the term _Weltanschauung_":

> As a guest in a friend's house, [Dilthey] had been assigned a bed near a reproduction of Raphael's _School of Athens_, and as he slept he dreamt that the picture had come to life. All the famous thinkers of antiquity began to rearrange themselves in groups according to their _Weltanschauungen_. Slowly into the dream composition came later thinkers: Kant, Schiller, Carlyle, Ranke, Guizot--each of whom was drawn to one of the groups that had formed around Plato or Heraclitus or Archimedes. Wandering back and forth among the groups were thinkers who tried to mediate between them, but without success. In fact, the groups only moved farther and farther apart, until they could communicate only among themselves. The thinkers had become isolated in their separate ap-

proaches to reality. (p. 42)

"The history of literary criticism and scholarship," as E.D. Hirsch rightly infers, "yields its own version of Dilthey's nightmare" (p. 43). And, certainly, literary criticism and scholarship on African literature yield a more terrifying nightmare than Dilthey's. The methodological foundations of much of the perspectivism that one encounters in African literature studies are steeped in atavism. If the perspective happens to be more incipient than methodological, the chances are that its basis will be suspect. One particularly prominent "perspective" thrives on anthropological and sociological fallacies. This "perspective" (or "approach") has a couple of related manifestations. First, there is the type of criticism that sees African texts as so many archaeological sites on which any number of anthropological and socio-cultural data can be excavated by the energetic critic who does not mind the inevitable perspiration under "tropical" conditions. Then there is, second, the critic who comes to African literature armed with his pre-text[ual] anthropological, historical, socio-cultural and political baggage. The critic proceeds to test his "knowledge" of Africans and Africa against the fiction created by African writers to see if the fiction is in consonance with "realism" as he perceives it or, in specific cases, to speculate, as Bernth Lindfors does, if "Armah's Histories" (like Two Thousand Seasons) "were trying to justify the ways of TANU to man by creating a legendary prehistory of Ujamaa."[44]

The characteristic pliability and omnivorousness of the novel make it particularly susceptible to facile reductionism. And in this instance, as in other instances, comparative perspectives are instructive. The point has been made about Charles Dickens, for example, that he had the map of London in his mind and he made extensive use of it. In the introduction to the New Oxford Illustrated Edition of Sketches By Boz, Thea Holme quotes "one of [Dickens'] fellow clerks in the law firm of Ellis and Blackmore" as saying:

> 'I thought I knew something of the town...but after a little talk with Dickens I found that I knew nothing. He knew it all, from Bow to Brentford.... He could imitate, in a manner I never saw equalled, the low population of the streets of London in all their varieties.' (p. vii)

We can turn to any number of Dickens's novels and find this clerk's comments substantiated by the specifications of dress, food, topicality, action and incident.[45] The novel's concern with the solidity of specification overflows from the nineteenth- to the twentieth-century. In Strong Opinions, Vladimir Nabokov, the aesthete par excellence, recommends the use of maps and diagrams "to provide...exact...details":

> In my academic days I endeavored to provide students of literature with exact information about details, about such combinations of details as yield the sensual spark without which a book is dead.... [I]n order to enjoy Tolstoy's art the good reader must wish to visualize, for instance, the arrangement of a railway carriage on the Moscow-Petersburg night train as it was a hundred years ago. Here diagrams are most helpful.... [I]nstructors should [for example] prepare maps of Dublin with Bloom's and Ste-

phen's intertwining itineraries clearly traced.[46]
If one's interest in Dickens and Joyce is mainly socio-historical, then one can spend one's time mapping out correspondences between Dickens's London and nineteenth-century London, and between Joyce's Dublin and the city of Dublin not, like Thea Holme and Nabokov, as means to literary ends, but as self-justifying ends in themselves. Indeed, nothing prevents the reader or critic from spending his time on what interests him in fiction. The critic can and usually does see what, and as much as, he wants to see. And it is for this reason that one can hardly disagree with the basic premise of Roland Barthes's contention that the literary text, "the site of language," is "the eternal space of all subjections": a vacuum/vide into which various readers pour different meanings and interpretations.[47] Criticism is, thus, self-revelatory to the extent that our critical discourses reflect our "approach," our "perspective," and/or our "literary competence." In practice, any number of critics can and do hold on to the tail of the proverbial monster and argue learnedly about what each critic is holding. The tail, like Humbert Humbert's "Lolita," is solipsized: it is, in effect, co-opted to feed each critic's propensity to inflict on the reading public his own potentially inexhaustible supply of tales about the tail. Ultimately, however, distinctions have to be made between tenable and untenable, between literary and non-literary interpretations, and it is at this stage that those

who are committed to anthropological, socio-cultural, or historical reductionism demonstrate their limited relevance to criticism and literary theory.

The criticism of African literature seems to indicate that the illusion of reality could be, and is usually very easily, taken at a distance for reality itself. African writers have created imaginary gardens and thrown into them some "'real' toads"[48]--like Jomo Kenyatta, the proverb, Lagos, [neo-]colonialism, corruption, "Biafran war," Kwame Nkrumah, coups, and so on--and these "toads" have leaped out of the pages of _imaginative_ literature to answer the presumptuous critic's wink of recognition. Having exchanged the illusion of reality for the bliss of instant recognition, the critic leap-frogs his way through texts and, in the end, sees little more than inflated "toads." Freed from the constraints of the generic, allegoric, and other codes which control as well as limit their "reality," these "toads" begin to serve the critic's non-literary interests. In this way, African literature comes to be saddled with the deadweight of "critics" who often turn out to be "student[s] of primitive customs"[49] or self-serving recorders of social and political upheavals in "'exotic' places."

Beyond "Influence": Comparativism, Misprision, and Intertextuality

The tribes of anthropods ("anthropology-pundits") have close affinities with their distant cousins, influence-hunters. The latter group has the unenviable reputation of reducing Influence Studies to the primitive art of source-hunting and echo-recording. Like Charles Tansley in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, the subject of influence-hunters is "the influence of something upon somebody."[50] The methods of influence-hunters are noticeable for their rejection of René Wellek's and Austin Warren's proposition that

> [s]uch a statement, for example, as 'Pope derives from Dryden' not only presupposes the act of selecting Dryden and Pope out of the innumerable versifiers of their times, but requires a knowledge of the characteristics of Dryden and Pope and then a constant activity of weighing, comparing, and selecting which is essentially critical.[51]

If the dedication page of Armah's Fragments could trigger off Charles Larson's "'influence' study," then it would appear to be the case that the critic, in this instance, is much closer to the fictional Charles Tansley than he is to fellow critics like Wellek and Warren. It seems to me that Julia Kristeva's concept of inter-texte offers a useful alternative to "Larsony."

"The term intertextuality," writes M.H. Abrams,

> is used to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to, other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the features of an earlier text by a later text, or simply by participation in a common stock of literary codes and conventions.[52]

Intertextuality provides echo-recorders and source-hunters with the one thing needful: an integrative system that is unquestionably literary. It also provides the extra dividends of relevance and applicability to African literature which, like Black literatures that straddle at least two canons, predisposes individual texts to intertextual analyses. Those critics who write various "introductions" to African literature have, for good reason, availed themselves of the "common stock of literary codes and conventions" applicable to accounts of the "emergence" or the "rise" of genres and literatures. Ernest Emenyonu's The Rise of the Igbo Novel recalls and willfully misreads Ian Watt's The Rise of the [English] Novel, while Eustace Palmer's An Introduction to the African Novel and The Growth of the African Novel recall, but do not necessarily misread, Arnold Kettle's An Introduction to the English Novel, 2 vols.

Harold Bloom's conception of "influence" bears a close relationship to Kristeva's inter-texte. In A Map of Misreading, Bloom maintains that "poetic influence...[does] not... mean the passing-on of images and ideas from earlier to later poets. Influence...means that there are no texts, but only relationships between texts. These relationships depend upon a critical act, a misreading or misprision, that one poet performs upon another" (p. 3). Moreover, the poet is "a man rebelling against being spoken to by a dead man (the precursor) outrageously more alive than himself" (p.19). For the African novelist who has adopted an imported genre and, in general, for African writers and critics concerned with the decolonization of African literature, the use of colonial languages makes "rebelling against being spoken to by a dead man (the precursor) outrageously...alive" inescapable. In applying Bloom's "misreading or misprision" to a different climate, I am suggesting that either term encapsulates a phenomenon whose basic tenet is as old as the beginnings or creations of genres, traditions, and literatures. To create "literary 'space'" for one's own endeavors one needs to be a "strong [mis]reader." Henry Fielding, for example, read Samuel Richardson's Pamela, concluded that it was a sham, and proceeded to write "Shamela." His "comic epic," Joseph Andrews, began as a variation on the Sham-Pam motif, but he found his métier and went on to become a great novelist in his own right. What traditional critics--and I am not using the word "traditional" in a pejorative sense--may see as a parodic impulse is filtered through post-Freudian sensibilities and translated into Bloom's "reading is therefore a miswriting just as writing is a misreading" (Map, p. 3). On the African scene, Chinua Achebe read Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary, didn't like what he read, and proceeded to write novels he would rather read. It is no accident that one of the earliest theorists of the English novel--I have in mind the preface to Joseph Andrews--and one of the most influential figures in African literature are "strong [mis]readers," extremely good novelists, and closely associated with the "emergence" of the English novel and the African novel respectively. Literary "influence" as willful misreading is exemplified in African literature, but critics have been slow in catching up with this phenomenon.

Achebe's well-documented "dislike" of Conrad, for example, reflects the African writer's reaction "against being spoken to by a dead man." Joseph Conrad's Arrow of Gold and Nostromo--"Nostromo," we may recall, "is a Man of the People" [Author's Note]--on the one hand, and Achebe's Arrow of God and A Man of the People, on the other, provide indices to the "critical acts [of 'miswriting' and 'misreading'] performed by [a] strong reader upon [the] text[s] he encounters."[53] Conrad, like Cary, had to be misread and the misreading formalized in texts that "privilege the representation of the ...[post-colonial] [B]lack voice."[54] In Morning Yet On Creation Day, Achebe volunteers this piece of information:

> At the university I read some appalling novels about Africa (including Joyce Cary's much praised Mister Johnson) and decided that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else, no matter how gifted or well-intentioned.
>
> Although I did not set about it consciously in that solemn way I know that my first book, Things Fall Apart, was an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son.[55]

The "act of atonement" is essentially a critical act which begets creative acts of [Nietzschean] "will to power."

African Roots, Black Fruits, and the Colored Tree [of "Knowledge"]

False gods killed the poet in me. Now
I dig graves

With artistic precision.
--Keorapetse Kgositsile, "Mandela's Sermon"

On balance, African literature is in a healthy state; it is the critical discourses on the imaginative literature that more often than not exhibit unhealthy symptoms. Some of these symptoms have been identified and commented upon. First, literal-mindedness which appears to be potent enough to interfere with the literary appreciation of African literature. Second, timidity which translates into the critic's insistence that he be not surprised or shocked by the "unfamiliar" and the "unexpected." Consequently, the freshness of potentially new discovery is lost on the critic because he dares not abjure the comforting familiarity of the single feature of the parabolic elephant "he happened to have touched first" for "uncertain" knowledge. And, third, there is the symptomatic failure to connect various critical discourses to informing systems, models or theories that may be comparable to, but need not be, "imported" or "foreign" ones. The corollary that these symptoms are eminently eradicable is implied by the tenor of my discourse [on discourses].

I use "roots" in the title of this concluding segment as a metaphor for "[return to] sources." An important implication of our discussion so far is that if we pay deserving attention to the oral sources of African literature and trace those informing sources to the written texts ("fruits"), we will find a growing body ("tree") of knowledge that might be indispensable to critical theories of Black-African literature[s]. It is, above all, important to have critical models and systems that are "colored" by African (literary) experiences. I have criticized some critics of African literature for the "rootlessness" of their critical-theoretical efforts. In each instance, I have found fault not with the critical theories per se but with the mode of application: I do not reject Anozie's structuralist, Ngara's stylistic, and Gugelberger's Marxist models out of hand.

When Georg Gugelberger, for example, informs me that the Marxist model is applicable to African literature because it is "internationalist" and that this model insists on the devaluation of "African specificity," I wonder why the critic is so anxious to discredit his own mode of application. If he had looked closely at the "African specificity" he intends to make invisible, he might have learnt about the communal basis and the functional nature of much of African orature [and literature], related that knowledge to sociological approaches to literature in general, and gone on to justify his own preference for Marxist criticism in particular. The resulting "colored" Marxist-sociological model would have been applicable to African literature not because it dispenses with, but because it is informed by, "African specificity."

I have identified instances of "African specificity" and discussed them in relation to selective Euro-American perspectives on signification, deconstruction, and on speech-act, communication, and reader-response theories. In such discussions, comparativism and intertextuality have been emphasized at the expense of [the] "influence" [of something Euro-American on somebody African]. And all this leads to a controversial conclusion: the general feeling that what needs to be said about African literature to date has been said, and that critics can do little but go through a vicious cycle of regurgitation until somebody writes the African novel, poem or play is misguided. It may be long overdue, but the fact remains that the day is still young for the sort of critical theorizing which gives prominence to African roots, Black fruits, and the Colored tree [of "knowledge"]. The chapters devoted to Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe substantiate some of the claims made for, and the issues raised about the interpretation of, African literature. In the process, alternatives are provided for approaches and perspectives one might consider "dubious" at best.

2. FICTIONALIZING AS FICTION-ANALYZING: AN INTRODUCTION

> It seems that the main concern of my life...has been reading novels, discussing novels..., writing about novels, and trying to write novels myself; and all these activities exist in my mind as a single activity.
>
> --Walter Allen, Preface to The English Novel

> [T]he very nature of the story is one of the key issues in [Anthills of the Savannah]. The way my people traditionally viewed the story...is being explored.... You have the story, you have the story-teller, so it is an exploration of the story and the story-teller.
>
> --Chinua Achebe, Interview with Anna Rutherford

Each of the four writers discussed in this dissertation would agree with Walter Allen that "the main concern of [his/her] life...has been reading [literature], [teaching and] discussing [literature].., writing about [literature], and ...writ[ing] [literature himself/herself]." My study of select fiction by Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe pays particular attention to two "activities [that] exist in [each novelist's] mind as a single activity":[56] fictionalizing and fiction-analyzing. When Achebe, for example, informs Anna Rutherford that "one of the key issues" in his novel Anthills of the Savannah is "the very nature of the story," he draws attention to a major concern of this dissertation. A story which concerns itself with its own "very nature," literally, analyzes itself; but if this were all, then we would not be saying anything that has not been said about "involuted fiction" which M.H. Abrams identifies with Nabokov's Pale Fire and defines as "a work whose subject incorporates an account of its own genesis and development."[57] Nor would we be parting company with the related term "self-reflexive fiction" which applies as much to the Sterne text as it does to Joyce's. Achebe's texts, like Armah's, Soyinka's or Aidoo's, read and feel different from those of Laurence Sterne, James Joyce or Vladimir Nabokov. The extent of the involution or self-reflexivity of the African novel to date is confined to a delineation or dramatization of the fictiveness of the fiction. And this is done, in the main, without either Shandean trappings like self-conscious "digressions, parentheses, dashes, [and] eccentricities of punctuation"[58] or the Nabokovian tendency to "[incorporate] strategies from chess, crossword puzzles, and other games"[59] into the fictional world.

Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah is not concerned only with "the..nature of [its] story"; it is also interested in exploring "[t]he way [the author's] people traditionally viewed the story [in general]." And there is more: the text's "exploration" is one "of [both] the story and the storyteller."[60] "The way [Achebe's] people traditionally viewed the story" suggests a different "tradition," a differing set of values. It is the story "traditionally viewed" in Achebe's sense--a view different from, but related to, other traditions[61]--that sponsors my use of "fictionalizing as fiction-analyzing" and "'critical' fiction" in the title of this dissertation. The same view underwrites the comparative and intertextual analyses in subsequent chapters. These chapters also show that the select fiction under discussion--fiction which explores "the very nature of the story...and the story-teller"--analyzes itself in a way that can be termed "critical."[62]

The traditional African view, apparent in Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and underlined in the old man's tale of the telling dovetailed into a critique of both the tale and the telling in Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah, finds its most basic formulation in Armah's The Healers:

> But now this tongue of the story-teller...flies too fast for the listener. It flies faster than the story-telling mind itself. Pride in its own telling skill has made it light.... So the story-teller now forgets this rule of masters in the arts of eloquence: the tongue alone, unrestrained, unconnected to the remembering mind, can carry only a staggering, spastic, drooling, idiot tale. In such a story, told by an unconnected tongue, the middle hurls itself at the astonished ear before the beginning has even had time to be mentioned. The end itself is battered into pieces. The fragments are smashed against the surprised listener's ear, without connections, without meaning, without sense.[63]

Armah, the novelist, makes it clear that his story, in part at least, is about "the very nature of the story...and the story-teller." The story-teller is reminded that the telling of the story has to be attuned to a central, enabling intelligence ("the story-telling mind itself"); and the "rule of masters in the arts of eloquence" is invoked for its critical and corrective functions. References are made to the "beginning," "middle" and "end" of the story without any insistence on the [generic] story beginning necessarily at the chronological beginning. Indeed, since The Healers itself begins in medias res, comments like "the middle hurls itself at the astonished ear before the beginning has...be[en] mentioned" signify the processes as well as the processing of Armah's fictional material, the story. Having begun in the middle of things, the story pauses for connections to be provided through flashback. In the words of the story-teller: "Let the error raise its own correction. The speeding tongue forgets connections. Let the deliberate mind restore them" (p. 2).

Within the context of Armah's oeuvre, the point being made by the story-teller in the very process of telling his/her story is that the story of The Healers must aim at whole-[some]ness: the isolated parts should fit into a patterned whole to provide a formal analogue to the thematic health-restoring process by which fragmented parts of the Akan-Asante/African body corporate are brought together. The absence of a group of "healers" in the second novel, Fragments, it is implied through verbal echo ("[t]he fragments are smashed..., without connections,...meaning,...[or] sense"), dictated a different telling. Here in The Healers, by contrast, "connections" are being made (where there had been none or few in Fragments); "meaning" is important (to counterbalance the sway of meaninglessness in The Beautyful

Ones and Why Are We So Blest? in particular); and the restoration of "sense" and "health" by "the healers" is necessitated by contamination in The Beautyful Ones, Baako's madness--which the psychiatrist, Juana, could do little about --in Fragments, the symbolic "impotence" of Solo and Modin in Why Are We So Blest?, and the one thousand years of communal dislocations in Two Thousand Seasons. The surface details of The Healers may be very entertaining; but beyond that the critic in particular is invited, even "taught," by the constituting tale of the telling to readjust interpretative perspectives for the appreciation of a novel which, unlike the novelist's previous ones, on the one hand, and "'Western' novels," on the other, uses "the classical structure of Akan folk stories: seven sections with each section subdivided into six parts. All of which adds to the novel's cultural nationalist appeal."[64]

The suggestion, that the novelists discussed in this study "teach" the reader/critic how to read/interpret them, goes beyond Achebe's statement that what is involved in his notion of "the Novelist as Teacher" is "essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word."[65] I focus attention on the strictly literary manifestation of "education." In the Euro-American tradition, Henry Fielding's prefatory remarks to Joseph Andrews, like those of Henry James and James Joyce's "schema" for Ulysses, for example, provide a necessary, if rather convenient, means to "teaching" the reader about, or at least alerting him to, something new, different or experimental. Authorial prefaces are rare in African fiction, and so the sort of "teaching" I am talking about usually takes place at a secondary level of signification within the text. On the surface of an Achebe or Armah text is the engaging story about "Igbo"/"Nigerian" or "Akan"/"Ghanaian" way of life; but beyond, beneath, or intertwining this primary level of signification is a secondary one which, on the one hand, underlines "the very nature of the story" and, on the other, anticipates and/or parodies the text's [own] criticism.[66]

This dissertation suggests that enough attention has been paid to the surface details of African texts and commits itself to the signifying depths of representative fiction by Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe. As a by-product of this commitment, literariness is valorized over literal-mindedness. The "theme" that undergirds my critical discourse--in effect, this study's "critical thematics"--is best summed up in a reformulation of Edmund Wilson's comment on Charles Dickens in "Dickens: The Two Scrooges": "even when we think we do know [Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe], we may be surprised to return to [them] and find...a [signification] of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than [is apparent in those treatises on 'cultural and religious conflicts,' 'tradition versus change,' 'proverbs,' and 'coups']."[67]

I return to one of the most widely read African novels, Armah's The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968), in the next chapter. By focusing attention on the willfully misspelt "beautyful," on the omniscient narrator's description of the protagonist as "the invisible man," on the role of Teacher--a role Ama Aidoo, for example, is unsure about (one "aspect of the book that is unclear," she writes, "concerns the role of the Teacher.... [W]hy does [Armah] envelop him in such mystery, this Plato-Aristotle quoting African philosopher"?)[68]--and on the function of Teacher's story about "the myth of Plato's cave," I substantiate, through textual analysis, the dissertation's "critical thematics": that, upon closer examination, even a well known novel like The Beautyful Ones yields a signification of "a more complicated reference and a deeper implication" than the usual concern with whatever the author may or may not be saying about "Ghana" on the novel's surface. The second part of the next chapter, devoted to Why Are We So Blest? (1972), suggests that Armah's third novel has been misunderstood and underrated due, in part, to perverse literal-mindedness. Given the fact that its predecessors had been accorded mixed responses by reviewers and essayists, this novel had cause to anticipate its misunderstanding and mistaken readings. In fact, it dramatizes this foreknowledge: "the questions...provoked a need to go ...deeper under...[the] surface" and, later, Solo's "eyes were drawn to a sign in which [he] could not help seeing more than a surface meaning."[69] The critic's inability or unwillingness to accept the text's invitation to probe its signalling depths cannot be anything less than perverse. If such fiction-analyzing hints could be missed or ignored, then one feels obliged to pose the question, à la [Virginia] Woolf, "how should one read an African novel?" Armah's novel lends itself to such inquiry: the two major African characters, the Lisbon-trained-Portuguese-speaking Solo and the Harvard-trained-English-speaking Modin, meet in a French-speaking North African country. The convergence of Lusophone, Anglophone and Francophone "traditions" in a newly independent African nation is no accident. Nor are the implications of such a convergence in Armah's fictional world likely to be lost on the informed reader particularly since Why Are We So Blest? is literally made up of "texts": the notebooks of the major characters. These texts comprise Armah's Text. (In this study, constituting texts, like notebooks, are referred to as "intratexts" and the composite Text as "metatext.") The discussion of Armah's first and third novels in Chapter Two leads to the conclusion that, to be taken seriously, the Armah critic must assume the inescapable responsibility to go beyond his initial, emotionally-charged "I hate..." or "I love..." response.

With the scope of the dissertation defined and the tone set by and in the first two chapters, "Soyinka's 'Quaint Anomaly'" falls into place in the third chapter. The changing times demand a new dedication from the artist. For Soyinka, "the times" constitute a "season of anomy": the massacre of Igbos, the Biafran war of secession, and the writer's own imprisonment. Does such a "season" ask of the novelist that he hold a mirror to the anomic signs of the times? Or does he fashion out an essentially "literary" sign-system that recollects massacres, war, and solitary confinement in tranquillity and, thereby, run the risk of tranquilizing the experiences themselves? How does the artist manage to keep enough distance between himself and his subject and still be true to his own injunction in "Après la guerre": "Do not cover up the scars"? Soyinka accepts this dilemma, proclaims it in the opening words of his novel ("A quaint anomaly..."), and, in this way, invites the reader/critic to become his accomplice as he grapples with "a quaint anomaly" in Season of Anomy (1973).

The question of the functional polemization of art, raised in the Soyinka chapter, is central to the assessment of Ama Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy (1977). Aidoo's text implicitly poses fundamental questions about fiction-writing and [fiction-]criticism in the 1970s and beyond. If the post-1970s critic succeeds in banishing potentially "polemical 'ideas'" like pride and prejudice, crime and punishment, hard times, North and South, [the] question of power, war and peace, and the motion of history from "canonized 'literature,'" what will take their place? In an inhumane world, what contribution do the pleasures of the free-playing postmodernist text and the bliss/jouissance of the avant-gardist critic make to the Humanities? Underwriting such questions is the suggestion by both the author and protagonist of Our Sister Killjoy that for a person who is black, female, and from that part of the world designated "third," the very act of writing or producing literature may very well be a "political" act. And Ama Ata Aidoo makes no apologies for laying siege to the Canon or Tradition that has rendered Black invisible, blacked out Woman, and relegated African literature to third-ratism.

Focus on Chinua Achebe's first-rate novel by any standards, Anthills of the Savannah (1987), in the fifth chapter marks the culmination of the substantiation of claims made for the African novel in the preceding chapters. Achebe, the consummate story-teller, treats readers to a skillfully designed plot in Anthills that is truly architectonic. Concluding remarks in Chapter Six are drawn from and enabled by each of the previous chapters: a close study of select fiction by Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe yields the "complicated reference[s] and...[deep] implication[s]" which inform literary criticism and critical theory. Students of "primitive customs" have had their day, but it is morning yet for critics who speak/write in "new accents."

CHAPTER II

ANALYZING AYI KWEI ARMAH'S FICTION[ALIZING]

Akan literary criticism...was largely...left to the producers of literature themselves. It took the form of establishing literary conceptions, explaining them to apprentices, and thereby trying to make them prevail.... Gifted producers of literature brought their talents to bear on these [processes], and their talents were first released and exercised in criticism, in an ordered sum of their constantly-aware response[s] to established pieces maturely run through, of evaluations and comparisons, and...also of shifting standards.

--W.E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa

The best way for a novelist to discuss the problem of The Novel is in the form of a specific novel.... Every serious novel is, beyond its immediate thematic preoccupations, a discussion of the craft, a conquest of the form, and a conflict with its difficulties.

--Ralph Ellison, "Society, Morality, and the Novel"

1. THE RHETORIC OF INVISIBILITY AND MISSPELLING AS MISPRISION IN *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN*

> A cultural violence--a mandated invisibility--..., in effect, erased the role of the [B]lack in... literature at the same time that the...[C]anon was being formed.
>
> --Alan Nadel, *Invisible Criticism*

> The strong reader, whose readings will matter to others as well as to himself, is...placed in the dilemmas of the revisionist, who wishes to find his own original relation to truth, whether in texts or in reality..., but also wishes to open received texts to his own sufferings, or what he wants to call the sufferings of history.
>
> --Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*

In "Ayi Kwei Armah Breaks His Silence--Somewhat," Josiah Uguru records an interview with Armah during which the latter "spoke about his literary philosophy and his evaluation of literature in Africa." Armah identified and recommended "forms of poetic words and techniques of expressing ideas, the ideas themselves, [and] the genres employed," among others, as "'rich intellectual tools'" indispensable to "'the [African] writer.'"[1] The language of fiction, the rhetorical "techniques [employed in] expressing ideas," and "the ideas themselves" are central to my discussion of Armah's first and third novels in this chapter, and crucial to my assessment of texts by Wole Soyinka, Ama Aidoo and Chinua Achebe in the next three chapters.

Uguru's interview with Armah is a rare one. "From time-to-time," writes Armah, "I receive interview requests from students, journalists or professors wanting me to discuss my writing. As a rule, my answer is no." The Ghanaian writer is aware of his reputation as a "reclusive writer"; but he has had "neither time nor inclination" "to correct" that image.[2] Such an image persists in spite of--and, in a sense, because of--non-fictional pieces like "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction" and "The Caliban Complex" in which Armah says some harsh things about the arrogance, which he sees as usually masking the ignorance, of identifiable Western critics of African literature and the "Western assumptions about Africa" that feed the arrogance/ignorance.[3] The controversial views, expressed in reaction to questionable interpretations of Armah's own work in particular and Black/African literatures in general, have elicited equally controversial responses to Armah, the man and the novelist. A common drawback in Armah criticism--observable in reviews, essays, and in Robert Fraser's book-length study of what he describes as Armah's "polemical fiction"[4]--has been the tendency to confuse the communal voice, the [first- of third-person] narrator, or the literary persona with the little that is generally known of Ayi Kwei Armah. Consequently, critics have consistently underplayed the author's ironic mode and insisted on imposing upon the novelist as limited a perspective as they allow for the fictional characters. Thus, "even when we think we do know" probably the most widely read of Armah's novels, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, "we may be surprised to return to [it]," as I do now, "and find...a [signification] of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than"[5] the perception in essays on "Armah's Ghana" (Derek Wright) or studies of Armah's "polemical fiction" (Robert Fraser).

Within the context of African literature, Armah's The Beautyful Ones is, in many ways, a profoundly unusual novel. I use "unusual" in the sense in which Armah's first novel defines as well as works out its unusualness, not in consonance with the way in which critics and essayists impose a limited sense of "the 'unusual'" on Armah's text. The latter sense is as limiting as the former is profound. Chinua Achebe, for example, characterizes The Beautyful Ones as "a sick book" and its author, "alienated."[6] On the one hand, Kofi Yankson sees in Armah's text what he describes as "an anatomy of shit,"[7] while Neil McEwan is struck by "the unsparing details of physical squalor."[8] And, on the other, Eldred Jones's definition of "the dominating mood" of the novel as one of "hopeless despair"[9] is echoed in Ama Aidoo's reference to "something frightening" and "pessimis[tic]" in the text.[10] The impressions which Armah's text evoke from Yankson, McEwan, Jones, and Aidoo are indicative of the impressionistic criticism of the novel, and Achebe's attempt to relate the text to the author's temperament provides an index to the sort of expressive criticism the Ghanaian writer has been subjected to. Behind the opinions which feed impressionistic and expressive criticism, Robert Fraser discerns "the shadow of a defensive posture" for, indeed, "[c]onfronted with a work so destructive of patriotic complacency, many critics have tended to confuse the charge of treason with that of artistic deficiency. Hence Armah comes to be saddled with strictures which are essentially political rather than artistic in nature."[11] If we add "strictures which are essentially" anthropological and socio-cultural to Fraser's "political" ones, it would be difficult to find an African writer who has not been "saddled" with such extra-literary baggage.

We return to Chinua Achebe's much-publicized comments on Armah to make the point that those comments are better discussed within the context of the lectures-and-discussions format punctuated, in the extract below, by notational indicators like "laughter" or "applause." In her introduction to the volume of presentations for the African Studies Program's [1973] seminar at the University of Washington, Karen Morell appropriately underlines "the degree of relativity of the writers' remarks. Their statements are not revealed truth but are a reflection of their minds in motion at a particular time, with a particular group of people"(IP, p. ix). It is against this background that we view the following exchanges:

> PARTICIPANT: You were criticizing Armah's novel last night. I am wondering if you think his inability to relate to Ghana, to the high[-]life, his changed attitude, or his poor vision,...could be related ...to his having lived in the West, to his attending Harvard. Do you think that has had an effect on his imagination, on his sensibility...? And..., secondly, I haven't read the second novel, Fragments,

but is there any change?

> ACHEBE: That's worse than the first [laughter] and the third is worse than the second. ... [W]hat you said about his training does have something to do with it. I think it started even before Harvard. He was caught young, and I think he himself is aware of the problem.... [H]e knows there is something wrong; not wrong, I mean there is something happening. (IP, pp. 52-53)

Achebe chokes on the word "wrong" and withdraws it, but he offers his audience nothing much to replace it by. He needed to have explained further the meaning of what he "mean[t]." The time Armah spent in the West, at Harvard, and the effect that is supposed to have had "on his imagination,...his sensibilility," provide raw material for expressivity. Armah is certainly more "aware of the problem" and "knows" much more than Achebe gives him credit for.

It is instructive to note that what Achebe likes about Armah comes out in critical analysis which deals primarily with how Armah writes: his "impressive first novel" is "striking"; "[i]t is a well written book. Armah's command of language and imagery is of a very high order indeed"(IP, p. 13). In contrast, what he does not like has to do, basically, with what Armah chooses to write about:

> There is a brilliant Ghanaian novelist, Ayi Kwei Armah, who seems to me to be in grave danger of squandering his enormous talents...in pursuit of [the] 'human condition.'... [The Beautyful Ones] is a sick book. Sick not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of 'the human condition.'
> ....
> True, Ghana was sick, and what country is not?... Armah is clearly an alienated writer.... [T]here is

> an enormous distance between Armah and Ghana.
> (IP, pp. 13, 14)

We see in the excerpt above the essayist's dilemma faced with a novel that is both obviously well written and apparently "destructive of patriotic complacency." And that dilemma is reflected in Achebe's ambivalent response to The Beautyful Ones. When he remarks that Armah's first novel "is...sick... with the sickness of 'the human condition,'" and goes on to add that "[t]rue, Ghana was sick, and what country is not?" he in fact, undermines the basis of his accusation, for if Ghana is "sick" like other countries ("what country is not?"), then Ghana's condition *is* "the human condition." Novels which concern themselves with "the human condition" are not necessarily set in the world at large. It has always been the peculiar gift of the great writer to have the capability to see in the *particular* (like Dickens's London, Joyce's Dublin, and the Sekondi-Takoradi of Armah's Ghana) the *universal*, or indeed, like William Blake in "Auguries of Innocence,"

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of [his] hand
> And Eternity in an hour.

"What is pertinent to Armah's art," we need to remind ourselves, "is the tendency to posit the general in the particular. The name of a town that appears in Fragments, 'Bibiani' (i.e., 'this is everywhere'), sums up this important aspect of Armah's work."[12] The "this is" has the impact of the intensely perceived part which is representative of the whole ([the]"everywhere" at once timeless and universal). Thus, "this is everywhere" signifies as well as encapsulates the symbolic code in The Beautyful Ones.

With an "episodic method of narration...not dissimilar to a series of camera 'takes'" coupled with "passages of pure visual detail"[13] like a bus coming to a stop at dawn at the opening of The Beautyful Ones, the man going to "the downstairs lavatory, the junior men's latrine,"[14] or the escape of a corrupt politician after a coup, Armah focuses attention on the "this is." At the same time, through the display of expansiveness captured in and by, for example, "the words of millions and the voice of ages"(p. 30), "this death of hope would spread all over the world"(p. 91), and, significantly, "each man's troubles were just an echo of another man's trouble, another woman's pain"(p. 75), the "this is" is anchored in the totalizing "everywhere": "the 'Ghanaian' condition" subsumed by "the human condition," the condition of being. The implications of the foregoing for the novel's protagonist, who is given no name in particular--he is simply called "the man"--demand further exploration.

With few variations like working overtime or leaving the office early, each working day for the man is like all other working days. He walks "into the darkness of the dawn"(p. 1) to get to the workplace and walks home at the end of the working day in the darkness of the night. The day is spent in a stuffy, choking, nightmare-inducing office from whose "floor the light came dully, like a ball whose bounce had died completely"(p. 14). Days "go on and on like this" and, given this scenario, "[a] man would just have to make up his mind that there was never going to be anything but despair" (p. 154). But occasionally the man is jolted out of his accustomed complacency when, for example, a man "swathed in kente cloth"(p. 27) offers him a bribe; or when he encounters "an object of power...and gleaming light...shimmering down in a potent moving stream"(p. 36), and out of this phenomenon of a car comes a class-mate who "'was actually stupid'" (p. 59), but is now transformed by politics and the party into a man of power and money, the toast of "praise-singing seller[s]"(p. 37); or, again, when "in the misty dawn"(p. 6), "the headlights of a fast-advancing car" catch him "in their powerful brightness" and, "too startled even to move"(p. 8), he enacts the helplessness which defines his unenviable position as victim ("he raised his eyes in a puzzled, helpless gesture"[p. 8]) and, finally, gets his worthlessness thrown at him by an unappreciative driver: "'[i]f your time has come, search for someone else to take your worthless life'"(p. 9). Excluded from the corridors of power, the man belongs to the shadows and is basically expendable: he is an "'[a]rticle of no commercial value!'"(p. 6).

That the man is the product of Kwame Nkrumah's or anybody else's Ghana is less important to me than that he belongs to literature. When the omniscient narrator calls the protagonist "the invisible man of the shadows"(p. 37), he invokes a variation on the rhetoric of invisibility that defines Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man and recalls, indirectly, Ellison's epigraph from Herman Melville's Benito Cereno:

> "You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"

Apparently "saved" from the corruption around him, the man remains a vicarious sufferer operating in the shadow of the corrupt (like Koomson) and the corruptible (like his wife and mother-in-law). Ellison's invisible man speaks for Armah's:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids--and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible,...simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me.[15]

Armah's protagonist is likewise "a man of substance" who has been reduced to an "article of no...value" by the combined efforts of "mirrors of hard, distorting glass" and "people [who] refuse to see" him:

> 'Estie is in the car. Come and greet her.'
> The man walks behind the suit...to the car....
> 'Estie, I found a stranger.'
> The woman's wire voice changes a little in tone.
> 'Aaaa, ei look. I didn't see anybody.'
> Out through the window she holds out a hand....
> The man takes the hand. Moist like lubricated flesh.
> It is withdrawn as quickly as if contact were a well-known calamity, and the woman inside seemed plainly

> to have forgotten about the man outside.
> (p. 38; emphasis added)

The suggestion that Ellison's invisible man speaks for Armah's nameless man needs clarification. There is something essentially "American" about both Invisible Man and its nameless narrator which the author articulates in his introduction to the 30th Anniversary Edition of the text: "the voice of invisibility issued from deep within our complex American underground" (p. xiv) and

> I felt that one of the ever-present challenges facing the American novelist was that of endowing his inarticulate characters, scenes and social processes with eloquence. For it is by such attempts that he fulfills his social responsibility as an American artist. (p. xvi)

Thus, it is understandable that Ellison's protagonist tells his story in writing and Armah's does not. "Eloquence" and "voice" in The Beautyful Ones are transferred from a first-person [protagonist-]narrator to the experiences of Teacher, the descriptive power of the omniscient narrator, and metaphorically to "scenes and social processes." We see and smell in Armah's novel much of the "shit," "grit" and "stench" of which invisible man speaks/writes and about which the reader reads in Invisible Man.[16] We recall, at this juncture, that a couple of chapters away from the conclusion of Invisible Man, the narrator-protagonist arrives at a belated resolution: "Oh, I'd serve them [Jack and the Brotherhood, the Nortons and Emersons] well and I'd make invisibility felt if not seen, and they'd learn that it could be as polluting as a decaying body"(p. 498). But neither time, plot, nor circumstance permits invisible man to make good on his resolution. In The Beautyful Ones, Ayi Kwei Armah "make[s] invisibility felt...[and] seen." The reader is made to "learn" about the attendant decay and pollution of both body and body politic. "Who knows," Ellison's narrator asks, "but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"(p. 568). Invisible man "speak[s] for" nameless man and nameless man embodies invisible man.

Though the man in The Beautyful Ones is literally and metaphorically confined to the sidewalks like those "bodiless heads...in circus sideshows," the congruence of the narrative's that-was-then and this-is-now method casts him in a different mold. At the end of the novel, Estella's husband, Koomson, finds the nameless protagonist substantial enough to go to him for help, and the man's wife, who had refused "to see"--in the sense of "believe in"--him, has nothing but "a deep kind of love, a great respect"(p. 160) for her husband, the man. In this way, the author imbues his "invisible man of the shadows" with the potency of the paradigmatic "this is." The reader is forced to look hard at, and get used to, the nameless, the invisible, and the shadows because the author offers little else besides them: if the novel does have any "center" at all, then they constitute it. Once the process of disorientation is sufficiently appreciated "the...man of the shadows" is seen in a new light. "The invisible man" becomes visible as poor but conscientious worker, intelligent without the benefit of higher education, victimized but civil, unappreciated but loving as a father and caring as a husband. In these representative roles, the man functions as every [ordinary] man in much the same way in which Ellison's invisible man is "Representative Man."[17] "The invisible man of the shadows" is much more alive than the Koomsons who are forever adding "gleam[ing]" things to the exterior of shrivelled lives not worth the trinkets they venerate. Armah's man is more visible on the pages of literary texts than on the pavements of Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana, West Africa.

The novel's symbolic coding infuses the particulars of day, week, the man, and Ghana, constitutive of the "this is," with the universalizing imperative signalled by "everywhere." Additionally, the symbolic code, by the laws of its nature, partakes of the ambiguous and the unfamiliar, and functions effectively in a novel bent on "showing...true but unexpected sides of our world"(p. 63). It is unfortunate that when Achebe calls Armah "an alienated writer" he limits the implications of his observation to expressive, pseudo-psychoanalytic criticism for, beyond thematics and expressivity, there is certainly a sense in which "alienation" is crucial to the reader's appreciation of The Beautyful Ones. Without necessarily venturing into epic theater, one needs to recall Bertolt Brecht's "alienation effects" the better to appreciate the novelistic variation on the German dramatist's "effects" in Armah's fiction. The Ghanaian writer takes "the familiar" or what is usually taken for granted and turns it into something "strange"; but the process itself--that of turning the familiar into something strange--is tinged with ambiguity. The result is that the perceptive reader is offered a fascinating text which sponsors the familiarity of the strange and the strangeness of the familiar. (I refer to the *perceptive*, rather than *any*, reader because Armah's "effects" are intended to elicit *critical* not *emotional* or *literal-minded* reader-response.)

The *cedi*, like the *pesewa*, is familiar to the characters in *The Beautyful Ones* because it is nothing less than legal tender. The conductor of a bus must be even more familiar than others with *cedis* and *pesewas* because it is his job to collect them from passengers. All this makes the bus conductor's reaction to a *cedi* note significant:

> The *cedi* lay on the seat. Among the coins it looked strange, and for a moment the conductor thought it was ridiculous that the paper should be more important than the shiny metal. In the weak light inside the bus he peered closely at the markings on the note. Then a vague but persistent odor forced itself on him as he rolled the *cedi* up and deliberately, deeply smelled it.... Fascinated, he breathed it slowly into his lungs. It was a most unexpected smell for something so new to have: it was a very old smell...so very rotten that the stench itself...came with a curious, satisfying pleasure. *Strange that a man could have so many cedis pass through his hands and yet not really know their smell*.... [H]is nostrils lost the smell of the *cedi*'s marvelous rottenness, and they itched to refresh themselves with the ancient stale smell. He took the note, unrolled it this time, and pressed it flat

> against his nostrils. (p. 3; emphasis added)

The conductor's reaction to "the paper" is not unlike the reader's to Armah's text. The author tells a strangely familiar story. The familiar, which finds expression in topicality--like "HASAACAS versus KOTOKO," "_Osagyefo_ the President," corrupt politicians, and a coup--yields the "'real' toads" in an otherwise fictional garden. "Shiny metal," to change the metaphor, is an appropriate emblem for the familiar and the topical which draw attention to themselves and are, thus, easily identifiable. Literary appreciation, however, involves more than easy identification of topical items. It is the entire text ("the paper") with its fictionalizing ("markings on the note") which the reader-critic "peer[s] closely at." "Fascinated" by the strange familiarity of a story so contemporary (the "unexpected smell for something so new") and yet as old as "money is the root of all evil" ("it was a very old smell...[an] ancient stale smell") and as timeless as "all that glitters is not gold," the reader-critic immerses himself in the text with the conductor's "satisfying pleasure." "[T]he _cedi_'s marvelous rottenness," in effect, captures the entire text's "marvelous" signifying prose and the "rottenness" of the signified.

In Armah's text, the unexpected twists to what is taken for granted and bringing to the fore the strangeness of the familiar are a function of both language ("_words and phrases so often thrown away as jokes reveal their true meaning_" [p.

4;author's emphasis]) and [macro-]structure:

> [A] boy who took a special pleasure in showing us *true but unexpected sides of our world*,...showed us...a book of freaks and oddities,...his favorite among the weird [illegible]...was a picture of...an old manchild.... The picture...was of the manchild in its gray old age, completely old in everything save the smallness of its size, a thing that deepened the element of the grotesque.... But of course, *it, too, had a nature of its own, so that only those who have found some solid ground will feel free to call it unnatural*. And where is my solid ground these days? (p. 63; emphasis added)

The author of *The Beautyful Ones* seems to take particular interest in showing the reader an imagined--a novelist's--world through the agency of a rendition which is as "true" as imaginative literature can be: "true but unexpected sides of our world." If the "old manchild" is "Ghana," then it should be understood that in the register of literary "freaks and oddities," the "Ghana" of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* takes up its place beside, for example, the bizarre "travels" of Swift's freakish "Gulliver," the "old manchild[ren]" of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and the capricious "Animal[s]" on Orwell's "Farm." If we consider either *Gulliver's Travels*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Animal Farm*, or *The Beautyful Ones* "a sick book," the "sick[ness]" seems to me to be more a function of reader-response than a comment on either Swift's, Golding's, Orwell's, or Armah's artistic integrity. The intertextual principle implied by the reference to *Gulliver's Travels*, in particular, is one of varying perpectives. If one gets close enough to a Lilliputian, as one would a *cedi* note, one would most likely see the Brobdingnagian in every Lilliputian. This perspectival principle also allows for different perpectives on the same thing[s]. The man in Armah's novel is surprised by his wife's "'way of looking at these things'"(p. 58). "These things" are the same for both man and wife; it is the perspectives on those same things that differ. The latter intra-textual perspectival principle is enabled by the metatextual insistence that even "the grotesque" has "a nature of its own, so that only those who have found some solid ground will... call it unnatural." That "solid ground," in the brave new world of contemporary fiction, is elusive at best ("And where is my solid ground these days?").

What glitters in *The Beautyful Ones* is anything but gold. The man reminds his wife that the glittering lives of the rich are not as "clean" as she believes: "'Some of that kind of cleanness has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump'"(p. 44). The word "bottom" assumes added significance in the related shit metaphor. However "grotesque" the latter metaphor is, the text enjoins readers to appreciate "a nature of its own." And the text, in fact, spells out the metaphor's nature and relates it to the comparable nature of those "cycles" which are evident in both life and literature:

> [T]he cycle of life and death, youth and age, newness and decay,...the good food we eat and the smelly shit it turns into with time.... [T]his [is] the way with all life,...there [is] nothing anywhere that could

> keep the promise and the fragrance of its youth forever,...everything grows old,...the teeth that once were white would certainly grow to be encrusted with green and yellow muck, and then drop off leaving a mouth wholly impotent, strong only with rot, decay, putrescence, with the smell of approaching death. Yet out of the decay and the dung there is always a new flowering. (p. 85)

The certainty of decay underwrites the inevitability of "a new flowering" for "the only new life there...is comes from seeds feeding on their own rotten fruit"(p. 145). The author of A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example, understands this. And so does Wole Soyinka. In his foreword to Opera Wonyosi, Soyinka notes that

> art should expose, reflect, indeed magnify the decadent, rotte[n] underbelly of a society that has lost its direction.
>
> ....
>
> To suggest that the turning up of the maggot-infested underside of the compost heap is not a prerequisite of the land's transformation is the ultimate in dogmatic mind-closure. All evidence in the material world of theatre and society asserts the opposite.[18]

It is silly, then, to pay too close an attention to literally referential decay, putrescence and shit in The Beautyful Ones without any linkage to their function in the text's macro-structure. The implications of coupling "decay" and "a new flowering," the unnatural and the natural, the unexpected and the familiar, rottenness and cleanness are dealt with more explicitly in Fragments and Why Are We So Blest? than in The Beautyful Ones, but the intimations are woven into the fabric of the latter.

The role of Teacher anticipates Baako's in the second novel and Solo's in the third. Teacher, like the writer, has nothing but words either to play with or share: "'The things people want, I do not have to give. And no one wants what I happen to have. It's only words, after all'"(p. 79). This character appears to have created for himself an artist's haven. He has freed himself of the filial and familial holds that might hold him back and, having thus distanced himself emotionally and physically from "the madding crowd," he lays in bed reading (entering, thereby, the world of kindred spirits), reminiscing (savoring thoughts recollected in tranquillity), or sharing "memories from the past"(p. 67) with his alter ego, the man. Teacher is, significantly, introduced to the reader through the eyes of the man:

> The sweet sadness of...music flowed out through a window near the end of a row...of houses, and the man stopped there. Holding on to the upright window bars, he looked into the room. Inside, on a small bed...a man lay reading. The man outside stood a long time at the window...looking quietly at the naked man within. (p. 50; emphasis added)

Every man, like the society he belongs to, may look into the "window" of the self and encounter "the naked man within." Not surprisingly, when "the man outside" meets with "the... man within," the stage is set for introspection (anguished personal recollections coupled with analysis of the self) and retrospection (recollecting "memories from the past").

The sequence of introspection and retrospection takes up the novel's longest chapter--the sixth--in which the flow of narration from a third-person point of view is broken by the "insider" narrative focus of Teacher's first-person recollections. Teacher's past is a past he shared with friends like Kofi Billy and Maanan; his story is, in effect, their story too: "I know that my friends felt the way I felt"(p. 66). And their story is rooted in the Gold Coast:

> There was no way out visible to us, and out on the hills the white men's gleaming bungalows were so far away,...that people did not even think of them in their suffering. And for those who did, there were tales of white men with huge dogs that ate more meat in a single day than a human Gold Coast family got in a month. (pp. 66-67)

Between the "us" of "there was no way out visible to us" and the "people" of "people did not...think of them in their suffering," the story of Teacher and his friends becomes the story-as-"history" of the colonized Gold Coast. Teacher's *histoire* of colonial injustices and post-colonial betrayal is his people's: it is an *histoire* which has left an indelible impression on the third-person narrator who makes editorial comments (pp. 78-80, for instance) on Teacher's first-person ("I") narration of that shared ("We," "Our") *histoire*.

Teacher's intra-text functions in Armah's metatext to suggest that the colonizer is the descendant of the slave master in much the same way in which the "lawyers," "merchants" and politicians of today who oversee the shipment of a post-colonial nation's resources to "their...masters" abroad(p. 81) are descendants of "chiefs selling their people for the trinkets of Europe"(p. 149). What is implied in the foregoing is a centrifugal principle--Teacher's story as the ever-widening story of his friends, a Gold Coast family, the enslaved and the colonized--that operates both spatially ("this death of hope would spread all over the world"[p. 91]) and temporally ("What had been going on...and was going on... and would go on and on through all the years ahead was a species of war carried on in the silence of long ages" [p. 12]). This centrifugal principle buttresses the novel's symbolic code and augments its macro-structure. And that overarching structure allows Armah to employ the device of the frame-story to illustrate some of the concerns of, and the responses evoked by, the novel.

Intertext, symbolism, and the familiar made strange characterize frame- and main-story. Since the omniscient narrator attributes the frame-story in question, a version of Plato's exemplum of the cave, to Teacher, there is the additional suggestion that Teacher's intra-text and Armah's frame-story are congruent:

> The man had said something earnest about the connectedness of words and the freedom of enslaved men, but then Teacher had said...that men were all free to do what they chose to do, and would laugh with hate at the bringer of unwanted light if what they knew they needed was the dark. He had told a story he said...meant more to him in his unhappiness than any other story, something he called the myth of Plato's cave...: a story of impenetrable darknesses and chains within a deep cavernous hole, holding people...for ages.... And out of these, one unfortunate human being is able at last to break from the chains and wander outward...to see the blinding beauty of all the lights and the colors of the world outside. With the eagerness of the first bringer the wanderer returns into the cave...and in there he

> shares what he has, the ideas and the words and the images of the light and the colors of the world outside.... But to those inside the...cave...the truth he sought to tell was nothing but the proof of his long delusion, and the words he had to give were the pitiful cries of a madman. (pp. 79-80)

The author goes to great lengths to establish a significant enough distance between the reader and "something...called the myth of Plato's cave" to encourage discriminating reader-response. Teacher's story is a re-working of Plato's myth told to the man and reported, from the point of view of a third-person narrator, as a story within a [larger] story. A story (Plato's) within a story (Teacher's) within a story (Armah's) brings up the issues of interpretation and appropriation. Through the process of [re-]interpretation, Teacher appropriates Plato's exemplum to suit his mood ("a story he said...meant more to him in his unhappiness than any other story") and frame of mind: "it possessed a special power over the teller's mind"(p. 80). Armah, in turn, appropriates Teacher's appropriation, mediates it through both the experience of "enslaved men" and the colonial literature of Conrad's "Heart of ['impenetrable'] Darkness," and filters it all through irony: "one unfortunate human being is able... to break from the chains...from the...reassuring chains" (p. 80).

Plato's exemplum is couched in metaphors which appeal[ed] to European missionaries and colonizers: truth, light and Whites from "outside" overcoming dark falsehood and Black "natives." The more "impenetrable" the perceived darkness the more blinding the light. Chinua Achebe's Reverend James Smith, for example,

> saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal.[19]

Implacable opposites are augmented by metaphors of polarization. Willful misreading for both Achebe and Armah involves, first, undermining--by questioning--so-called "truths" that are taken for granted and, second, reinterpreting--through the processes of [re-]appropriation and acculturation--those "truths." Armah plays the usual metaphorical polarization of "light" and "dark" against the unusual discrimination between "darknesses"(p. 80), and goes beyond that to distinguish one shade of light from another: one can, literally, do without "unwanted light"(p. 79), and "blinding" light(p. 80) both as metaphor and literal referent is equally "unwanted."

The foregoing assumes added importance when one recalls that in the build-up to Teacher's story about Plato's cave, the man

> remembers times when his friend...had talked in the way...that parted everything so clearly into the light and the shadow, the greatly beautiful things ...and the starkly ugly things.... But what a painful kind of understanding, so that he wastes it all in the end with other words that destroy the pictures, words that mix the beauty with the ugliness, words making the darkness twin with the light, and in the end he says what he now believes, that in the end

> that is the one remaining truth. (p. 79)

The progression from Teacher's songs of innocence ("the way ...that parted everything so clearly into the light and the shadow") to those of experience ("words making the darkness twin with the light") is marked by "a painful kind of understanding." And that "kind of understanding" is necessary preparation for the rather sullied novelistic "truth" that "in the end," beauty and ugliness, like light and darkness, "'have [been] mixed...all together! Everything...mixed... with so many other things'":

> She...bent down to take in her hands as much of the ...sand as they could hold, and then stood up letting the sand drop...free through her fingers to drift away with the soft breeze.... And as the sand fell she was saying with all the urgency in her diseased soul, 'They have mixed it all together! Everything!.... And how can I find it when they have mixed it all with so many other things?'
>
> She stooped again...looking for something lost in the sand, trying in her search to separate the grains. (p. 180)

The metaphor of fragmentation that characterizes the excerpt above anticipates *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, recalls *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, and echoes *Invisible Man*'s

> *She looked surprised, then thoughtful, then baffled. ".... It's all mixed up; First I think it's one thing, then I think it's another. It gits my head to spinning.... Hit's like I have a fever. Ever' time I starts to walk my head gits to swirling and I falls down...."*[20]

But in much more explicit terms than before, the things which have been "'all mixed up'" are identified in *The Beautyful*

Ones as linguistic constructs--metaphors, symbolism, connotations of words. Canons are under siege in a literary universe which feels no longer at ease. Consequently, there is the urgent need to [re-]interpret those very interpretations that have canonized discrete fragments of literature and relegated others to "circus sideshows."

Armah trains his searchlight on the stigmatized "circus sideshow" and says, in effect, "this [also] is." This explains why the most visible man in The Beautyful Ones is the "invisible man of the shadows"; why the arrogance of the colonizing White person is as objectionable as the "insulting white[ness]"(p. 10) of the Atlantic-Caprice hotel; why "the gleam," whether it is "the white men's gleaming bungalows" (p. 66) or asociated with the Koomsons, repels as much as it attracts(p. 10); why people can and do make a conscious choice to reject "light" in favor of "the dark" ("men... would laugh...at the bringer of unwanted light if what they knew they needed was the dark"[p. 79; emphasis added]); and why what is "nice" and "clean" may very well have "'more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump'"(p. 44). From this vantage point, one can see and read Armah's novel as willfully misreading and, in the process, reinterpreting identifiable informing metaphors in much of Euro-American literature. Plato's exemplum functions in Armah's text as an approximation to a "classic" paradigm: "[t]he trope of blackness in Western discourse," writes Henry

> has signified absence at least since Plato. Plato, in the *Phaedrus*, recounts the myth of Theuth...and the introduction of writing into Egypt. Along the way, Plato has Socrates draw upon the figure of blackness as a metaphor for one of the three divisions of the soul, that of 'badness.'[21]

The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born suggests, ultimately, that canonized "beauty" in Western discourse thrives on so much "'badness'" or "ugliness" at somebody else's--in this instance, the "Black" person's--expense that, for post-colonial African literature, the birth of the "unusual" *Beautyful*--as distinct from the "usual" *beautiful*--Ones, is both necessary and, indeed, inevitable.

Armah's second novel, *Fragments*, describes the birth pangs of a "Beautyful One." In "Armah's F-R-A-G-M-E-N-T-S"[22] I discuss the implications of, first, reading the name of the protagonist's uncle, Foli, as a pun on the French *folie* and, second, relating madness in the novel to Serge Doubrovsky's conception of *folie* as "a new reason attempting to establish itself."[23] The artist-protagonist's "madness" ("[his] new reason attempting to establish itself") corresponds to the "unusual" (the "beautyful") just as the "sanity" of those who consign him to a mental institution answers to the "usual" (the "beautiful"). Irony in *Fragments* is, thus, structural. And it is at this level--the structural--that Armah's first two novels anticipate his third.

2. WHY ARE WE SO [READ]?: A QUESTION OF FICTION-ANALYZING

> At a time like this, scorching irony...is needed.
> --Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro"[24]

> Most commonly we come to books with blurred and divided minds, asking of fiction that it shall be true,...of biography that it shall be flattering, of history that it shall enforce our own prejudices.
> --Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?"

When Virginia Woolf poses the question, "how should one read a book?," she uses the medium of an essay to say some disarmingly forthright things about reading as an individual-[istic] act: "I want to emphasise the note of interrogation at the end of my title. Even if I could answer the question for myself, the answer would apply only to me and not to you."[25] The courtesy Woolf extends to "the common reader" is fed by a principle of relativity which I want to emphasize in my discussion of Why Are We So Blest?. Armah's third novel, it will also be argued, raises interpretive issues which compel the perceptive reader to reexamine his assumptions about the African novel.

The title of Armah's third novel replicates that of an essay written by an unidentified person in the Sunday Times to commemorate Thanksgiving in the United States. Portions from this essay are read aloud by Mike, described as "'Fascist,'" for the benefit of fellow students called Ron, Steve, Chuku, Modin and characterized as "'comsymps'"[communist sympathizers].[26] The speaking/reading individual, like the listening group, represents a particular ideology. Conversation between these people almost inevitably assumes the nature of an interplay of contrasting ideological positions, rhetorical strategies, points of view, levels of discourse, and mythologies:

> "Hey, this is great," Mike said.
> "Keep it to yourself," I[Modin] said.
> "You don't run from sharing a good thing, Modin. It's irrational."
> "If it's good for you it's bad for me."
> ....
> [Mike] couldn't take his eyes off the magazine now. "Listen to this. This guy is good....
> 'The myth of Paradise finds its full meaning here, in the New World. Paradise is a state of grace, and grace is space--the distance that separates the holy from the merely human, the sacred from the profane. ... And that is the distance between the American commonwealth and the remnants of the world. It is the measure of our blessedness.
> "'The vulgar have come to call it abundance. That is unavoidable, for even here the vulgar imagination remains myopic.... But there is no necessity for the vulgar to acquire vision. Here they too are blest at their own level. The blest among the blest know what this vision from the New World is....'"
> "He is terribly smug about America," [Modin] said.
> "Not smug. Just honest. We are fortunate."
> "Depends on which America you choose to see."
> "America is one." (pp. 97-99)

"America" may be "one"; but it turns out that "the so-called Indians" and "Negroes" are, from Mike's point of view, justifiably outside the scope of the Sunday Times article: "Look, the piece is titled 'Why Are We So Blest?' The guy didn't set out to write about the underprivileged"(p. 99). And Mike goes on to expatiate upon this:

> "It's the story told from our point of view, Modin. After all, there are so many of the unfortunate in

> the rest of the world. Why should we here have to tell their story?" (p. 100)

The story told from Modin's point of view does not impress Mike. The former is accused of "'deliberately trying to lower the level of discourse'"(p. 101). Mike then invokes Greek mythology in an apparent attempt "to [raise] the level of discourse" and counter Modin's "'rhetoric'"(p. 100); but the "comsymp" reminds the "fascist" that "'[t]here are other myths'"(p. 102). The explicit identification of Modin's and Mike's political-ideological sympathies, and the link established between ideology and point of view, mythologies, discourse and rhetoric, remind one of Roland Barthes's observation that "the capital sin in criticism is not ideology but the silence by which it is masked."[27] Thus, how one reads any particular text is very much a function of what one brings to [bear on] that text.

The article, "Why Are We So Blest?," generates the dramatization of a clash of opposing viewpoints because Mike insists on reading it aloud rather than quietly to himself as he is urged to ("'Keep it to yourself'"). The dialogue occasioned by the reading makes it clear that Mike reads without the ironic filter Modin cannot do without. To Mike, "Why Are We So Blest?" constitutes an affirmation of the "blessedness"(p. 100) he shares with the author of the piece. Mike is the anonymous author's "fellow-worker and accomplice" --he "[tries] to become him" in the act of reading.[28] To

Modin, however, the question "Why Are We So Blest?" is a cruel one calling, as it does, for the ironic [non-]examination of the state of the "unblest"(p. 98). How one reads "Why Are We So Blest?" prefigures one's interpretation of Why Are We So Blest?. Both the polemical essay, "Why Are We So Blest," and the non-pragmatic fiction, Why Are We So Blest?, allow for the coexistence of "'opposite pole[s] of the same reality'": "'[m]atter of fact,'" opines Mike, "'blessedness as a state can't exist without its opposite. It wouldn't make sense'"(p. 100).

We need to remind ourselves that the prominence given to Mike's speaking/reading voice, and the immediacy of the exchanges between Modin and Mike, are doctored. The reader reads Mike's reading and the ensuing dialogue from the pages of Modin's notebook. That notebook comes into Aimée's possession after Modin is left to bleed to death "in the desert" (p. 288). Aimée, who has her own notebook and features as prominently in Modin's notebook as he does in hers, in turn hands both Modin's and her notebooks to Solo with the injunction that they be kept safe and not shown to anyone. Solo, of course, thinks and acts otherwise. Apparently, Aimée and Solo cannot agree on how to treat the notebooks and, given what we know about them, they can hardly agree on how to read them. Solo's reading or interpretation of the notebooks entrusted to him is not given any privileged status at the expense of other readers' reading or interpretation of those notebooks. Thus, when Robert Fraser suggets that "[f]or much of the text Armah resigns his narrative and explicative function to Solo, with whose weary view of things the authorial consciousness ultimately merges,"[29] he does the reader and Armah's novel a disservice. Armah may have allowed Solo a limited narrative function; but a variation on the same privilege is extended to Modin and Aimée. Each character's narrative function is "limited" because it is competing with other, equally "limited," narrative points of view. Structurally, Solo's explications and reminiscences are given the same segment-autonomy accorded the notebook entries of Modin and Aimée. Solo's "weary view of things" does not merge with "the authorial consciousness." Rather, depending on particular circumstances, Solo's "view of things" either underlines, challenges, or contrasts with other fictional characters' "view of things"--characters he comes into contact with directly or indirectly through notebooks, letters and journals.

The name "Solo" functions in Armah's fictional world as the anglicized equivalent of the Akan name "Baako" (which means "one" or "single" and implies "alone," "[going] solo"). Solo's second name is "Nkonam"(p. 58). And "Nkonam" in Akan translates loosely into "I walk alone." The full name "Solo Nkonam" is, therefore, a tautology that is textualized, in this instance, as a paradigm of self-reflexivity. What we see of and read about Solo suggests that his is a tortured person's doomed solo effort to come to terms with himself in a fictional world peopled by characters who are as tortured, in their own way, as he is. It is these characters who have as "weary [a] view of things" as he. On some of those occasions when Armah appears to Robert Fraser to have "resign[ed] his narrative and explicative function to Solo," "narrative" refers to nothing more than the provision of straightforward, sometimes banal, information; and "explicative function" turns out to be Solo's attempt at self-analysis:

> The entries in the African's book do not all bear dates. The things he wrote of were in general not events; they were more like concatenations of ideas. Some I have not understood at all..., I have let them alone.
>
> The book of the American girl does not contain much that promises to be understandable....
>
> I do not, in the end, understand his attraction to her. The truth is, I do not want to understand. I am afraid to understand. Afraid, ultimately, for myself. (Unnumbered page [71])

Since the reader is given access to the entries in Modin's notebook, he can find out for himself that not all the entries "bear dates." He can also assess for himself the nature of the things Modin has written about. Solo's crude attempt to condition the reader's response to "[t]he book of the American girl" is uncalled for. If he finds little in her [note]book "that promises to be understandable," then he lacks the intuition and empathy of the author who created her. Solo cannot be speaking for Armah. "In the end," however, Solo redeems himself, the author who created him, and the text in which he functions: "[t]he truth is, I do not want to understand. I am afraid to understand. Afraid, ultimately, for myself"[emphasis added]. Solo's responses to Modin's and Aimée's notebook entries, we notice, are so personal and self-revealing that he would rather Armah had not made them public. This implied wish reminds one of Aimée's entreaty: "'Don't let anyone see them [the notebooks].... No one'"(p. 267). Solo ignores Aimée's earnest request and, thus, sets himself up for a telling ironic reversal [of roles]. Such ironic reversals abound in Why Are We So Blest?: their cumulative impact is to undermine expectations and challenge assumptions.

The question "how should one read Armah's third novel?" is a legitimate one to ask. Why Are We So Blest? is difficult to place, read or interpret partly because it is a "crossover" text: it arises out of the first two novels, anticipates the last two, belongs to neither category and is, therefore, potentially more fascinating than either category of texts. The crossover principle is discussed explicitly in the novel. From Modin's notebook entries we read Mike's observation that Modin himself is a "crossover":

> "Modin, you're nobody's plaything.... In the Greek tradition you'd be a crossover. One of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero. Part man, part god. Therefore more interesting than either." (p. 101)

When Modin draws attention to "'the Promethean factor,'" Mike is forced to consider the possibility of "'a reverse crossover'"; but decides, ultimately, that "'that's insane.'" Modin suggests that they agree to disagree: "'[t]here are other myths, you know'"(p. 102). What Mike may not know is that Chinua Achebe, for example, borrowing from "'other myths,'" creates a character, Ezeulu, who is part man part god, in Arrow of God. This "interesting" state, however, is not without its dangers. Ezeulu goes mad. And the reader, like the chief priest himself, has cause to ask why he is so blest?: "But why, he [Ezeulu] asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him...?"[30] The reader's knowledge of what Mike may not have known makes the latter's use of the word "insane" ironic. More important, we need to remember that by the time we read about the exchanges between Modin and Mike quoted above, Modin is already dead. The recollection that Modin had undergone a symbolic and ritualized form of castration at the hands of Europeans (those who "live on Olympus" in the application of Mike's mythology) and had been left dying in the "hard, stony"(p. 278) African desert ("the plains" Modin is supposed to have "rise[n] from"), makes Mike's crossover reference doubly ironic. The [reverse] crossover motif and irony are important to our informed appreciation of Why Are We So Blest?. If, in reading the signs in the fictional world, Solo cannot "help seeing more than a surface meaning"(p. 262), then the literary critic who interprets what Solo "sees" cannot afford to be any less perceptive than the fictional character.

The surface details of sexual encounters and apparent racial confrontations in Why Are We So Blest? have made a strong impression on critics. Titillated by such details, particularly the sexual ones, some of Armah's critics have added their own outrageous embellishments. This, for instance, is how Robert Fraser presents Modin's relationship with the Jeffersons in his "The American Background in Why Are We So Blest?":

> Professor Jefferson, the Africanist scholar who takes a patronizing interest in the young [Modin] Dofu on his arrival in the States, is impotent. Consequently it is left to the abashed and confused student to satisfy his nymphomaniac wife. When the professor discovers the betrayal, he comes after the copulating couple with a loaded shotgun, and dispatches Dofu to hospital with multiple wounds. Such incidents would be palatable if they were sprinkled with the slightest spice of humour. Of humour in this sense--generous, forgiving humour--however, the American scenes are almost innocent.[31]

In a hypothetical morality play, Mr. Humor and Mrs. Humor may beget any number of little Humors, and the Humor family can skip around bestowing "generous forgiv[eness]" on their neighbors, the Enmity family. In the register of literary criticism, however, "generous, forgiving humour" suggests little more than odd "frase[r]ology." Stranger than fiction is Robert Fraser's assertion that Professor Jefferson "comes after the copulating couple with a loaded shotgun." In A.K. Armah's Why Are We So Blest?, the professor stabs Modin with a knife:

> First there was a noise from inside the [Jeffersons'] house, of glass breaking, metal dropping. I [Modin] turned to look. Mrs. Jefferson held me

> tighter....
> Next, something cold and sharp hit me.... Then the object was removed and my own hot blood was rushing down the side of my neck. I got up. The object went into my chest--an inept stab--then sliced my cheek. I reached for the shape wielding the knife....
> Mrs. Jefferson says her husband kept stabbing me till the other dancers came and pulled him away. (p. 156)

Modin is stabbed not shot. And the implicit proclamation of Modin's assailant, like that of Michael Udomo's assailants, is Casca's "Speak, hands, for me!"[32] Modin's stabbing ("her husband kept stabbing me till the other dancers...pulled him away") is as symbolic as Caesar's in Julius Caesar and as ritualistic as Udomo's in A Wreath for Udomo. Modin, however, survives his stab wounds, and the text makes it clear that the physical wounds are objective correlatives of "deeper," "spiritual" wounds:

> I [Modin] find it bad that I should have run away from knowledge of the deeper wounds, the spiritual damage awaiting me in these involvements, till a physical wound forced on me the necessity to think of what my life...has been about. (p. 159)

The "thrust" of "these involvements," like the one with Mrs. Jefferson, incapacitates with as much certainty as stab wounds: "[t]he friendship I thought was most peaceful would certainly have turned out to be the most ruinous if I had not seen through it and evaded its thrust"(pp. 156-157). Modin suffers from multiple stabs of passionate agony before and after he is stabbed by the professor. When Robert Fraser invents a "shotgun," gets it "loaded," and puts it in the hands of Professor Jefferson, he simultaneously unloads

Armah's text of the physical stabbing which feeds the cluster of stabbing imagery that is of importance to any serious discussion of Why Are We So Blest?. Ordinarily, one would expect the university professor in America of the 1960s to "[come] after the copulating couple with a loaded shotgun." And Armah could not have been unaware of this. By deliberately undermining expectations and challenging presumptions, Armah signals his interest in codes that are ironic and essentially novelistic.

Professor and Mrs. Jefferson have a daughter called Molly who is old enough to be a graduate student(p. 131). Like most couples their age, the Jeffersons make love "'[o]nce in a while'"(p. 154). Robert Fraser's categorical assertion that "Professor Jefferson...is impotent" is not substantiated. And the critic obviously does not feel the need to explain why he turns Mrs. Jefferson, who uses Modin to get her husband's attention, into what he describes as a "nymphomaniac wife." When Fraser introduces a "black buck," who "seems to be gifted with almost endless virility,"[33] into the world of the "impotent" white male and the "mymphomaniac" white female, it becomes obvious that the fiction of a stereotypical lust triangle is being presented as "criticism" of Armah's novel. Ironically, Modin--Fraser's "black buck"--exhibits the critical bent which is woefully lacking in Fraser's brand of "Larsony." Like Solo, Modin is interested in going beyond surface details:

> I [Modin] had time to think of destruction. The break with Oppenhardt was critical. I had done it as something merely natural. But the questions following it provoked a need to go a little deeper under my own surface. I went.
> ....
> These women I have known have had deep needs to wound their men. I have been an instrument in their hands. The men have reacted to me with a fear difficult to hide, and I should have known my annihilation would be a cure for part of their disease. (p. 162)

Modin alludes to a "disease" more destructive of self-worth and personal integrity than physical impotence. The fictional character goes "a little deeper under...[the] surface" of things to unearth the deadly game of sexual [power-]politics for which "nymphomania" is a misnomer.

Modin Dofu is aware of the "black-buck"/"black stud" stereotype, and there is enough emotional and intellectual distance between him and this stereotype that he can actually joke about it. When Aimée asks him what he is studying at school, Modin replies "'Soc. Stud.'"(p. 175). In fact, the conversation between the African student of Social Studies and the [Euro-]American student of African History, which leads up to the latter's question and the former's answer, discourages stereotypical speculations:

> She [Aimée] laughed, then asked me [Modin]: "Why were they [graduate students in psychology] so scared?"
> "I thought you knew."
> She laughed again, very loud.
> "You live around here?"
> "Adams."
> "That's close. Can I come in with you?"
> "When?"
> "Now."
> "Right now?"
> She nodded. "I won't rape you. Just want to use your sink and mirror...."

> ....
> "It's nice in here," she said....
> "Kind of bare, but nice. I don't know why, but I feel relaxed. You['re] a senior?"
> "Yes."
> "In what?"
> "Soc. Stud. You?"
> "History. You're West African."
> "Is it so easy to tell?"
> "I didn't guess. I've been to East Africa, so I'd have known...."
> ....
> ".... What part of West Africa?"
> "Does it matter?"
> "Not if it doesn't to you. Hey, you're kind of mysterious."
> "Was it mysterious of me to let you in?"
> "I only wanted to be friends. You're not upset, are you?"
> ....
> That's how I met her. I held the door open for her and she left. (pp. 175-176)

The psychology graduate students have been "'scared'" because Aimée has shattered their assumptions and undermined their expectations. As one of eight "subjects" to whom "graduated ...shocks of increasing intensity" are administered to determine the "specific threshold of tolerance for pain" (p. 170), Aimée records a level of "tolerance for pain" far beyond everybody else's, contrary to "an idea of Nietzsche's ...that Africans...[are] less sensitive to pain than Europeans"(pp. 170-171). Modin Dofu is one of the seven other "subjects," and the conversation quoted above takes place soon after that laboratory experiment. Neither Modin nor Aimée fits the Neitzschean stereotype. In the conventional wisdom of the psychology students, both "subjects" are atypical. The ironic reversal of stereotypical European-

African roles in the laboratory is complemented by an equally ironic reversal of assumed male-female attitudes outside the laboratory. It is Aimée who assures Modin that he will not be "'rape[d]'"; it is she who "'feel[s] relaxed'" in his room; and it is she who is anxious to ensure that he is "'not upset.'" In a novel which invites "'you [to] imagine you're them'"(p. 241)--to put yourself in other people's position, to see yourself as others see you--it is not surprising that the three main characters, Modin, Aimée and Solo, act out the novel's [reverse] crossover and ironic reversal motifs.

Modin's and Solo's journeys to the heart of whiteness replicate Aimée's reverse journeys to the heart of blackness. From Aimée's transcript of an interview with Mzee Nyambura in Kansa, Africa, we read about the local people's attitude toward a white person:

> We went hours before dawn. Perhaps three, perhaps two. We found Ndugu Pakansa with a woman at that hour in his house, and a white woman. It was not easy to keep down hard thoughts about Ndugu Pakansa's sickness. No matter how kind you wanted to be, you could not call that woman beautiful.... There was nothing in her face or in her motion that spoke of wisdom. (p. 38)

In Portugal, the perception is that Solo is as much a type of "sickness" as the unnamed "white woman" is in Kansa. At La Cova in Lisbon, Solo had given his Portuguese girl-friend, Sylvia, "a small silver ring"(p. 62) as a token of love. "A small group, three men and a woman, watching [them] with undisguised attention"(p. 63), did not like what they saw.

The woman in the group, Maria, spoke for the rest:

> She...stopped directly in front of Sylvia....
> "What is it you want?" Sylvia asked.
> "You know very well what it is we want," the woman said. "What you are doing is very foolish."
> ....
> "I will not talk about that," Sylvia said.
> "And why not?"
> "It is something personal."
> "What is the meaning of that?"
> "It is private."
> "Private from us?"
> "It is private," Sylvia repeated.
> "But to the stranger you open yourself, Sylvia," the woman said. "Speak to me. What sickness is this?"
> (pp. 64-65)

It is instructive to note that the African, Mzee Nyambura, and the Portuguese, Maria, both use the word "sickness" to describe relationships they object to. The isolated outsider in Kansa or Portugal is perceived as the convenient embodiment of "fears...unknown"(p. 168)--fears which the dominant group would, literally, rather not know. Metaphorically, the outsider is a type of "sickness." And the cure for this "sickness" is excision.

In the world of Why Are We So Blest? the cumulative force of racial and geographical differences, "fears...unknown," and multiple perspectives makes relationships between Blacks and Whites anything but ideal. The novelist suggests that the difficulties that impact upon interracial relationships are the ingredients for [inter-]personal drama with geo-political implications. Africa's relationship with the West, it is implied, has been less than ideal. The interpenetration of the personal and the geo-political is made explicit in the novel:

> The man in me [Solo]: the African absorbed into Europe, trying to escape death, eager to shed privilege, not knowing how deep the destruction has eaten into himself. (p. 232)

Why Are We So Blest? suggests that, in the immediate context of relationships between Africans and Europeans and in the larger context of Africa's relationship with Europe, "privilege" and "destruction" are intertwined. In dealing with this subject--relationships between Africa[ns] and Europe[ans]--the author's ambivalence mirrors the ambiguity that characterizes such relationships. The language of Why Are We So Blest? is saturated with ambivalence, ambiguity, and variations on those words. Solo is said to have been "lost in this story of the ambiguity of love, of its closeness to hate"(p. 28). Unable to get to "the root" of love's "fatal attraction"(p. 230), Solo's speculations get increasingly philosophical:

> Love. A fusion, a confusion, of the self with an other self. With terrifyingly different, other, selves, a terrifying case of love. (p. 139)[34]

Ambivalence and ambiguity feed, and are in turn nourished by, the novel's ironic mode.

In consonance with the novel's multiple points of view, Portugal is to Solo what the United States is to Modin and Kansa is to Aimée. Of particular interest to us, at this juncture, is the observation that some of Modin's distasteful experiences on the east coast of the United States are comparable to Aimée's in East Africa. On her first night at Vilima City, Kansa, Aimée meets Dr. Joromi Longai who propositions her:

> I accepted. He drove me home immediately.... In bed he did everything in a great hurry. He didn't seem to care that I was around. Didn't bother to find out about me.... I felt used. He looked disgusted [when] I asked him why he'd done things that way.
> "Which way?"
> "It doesn't interest you whether you satisfy me?"
> The guy laughed. He said: "I'm not a fool, to try and satisfy a white woman. You want me to fetch water in a basket."
> God, I never felt so terrible. (p. 144)

When Modin says that he has "been an instrument in [white women's] hands"(p. 162), he speaks about the humiliation Aimée must have felt at Joromi Longai's home.

Since Aimée is in Kansa to carry out research into the leadership of "the Moja Moja rebellion"(pp. 143, 177), her affair with Bombo Pakansa, who is described as "head of state," is both humorous and significant. If "Kansa" is Kenya, then "Moja Moja" is Mau Mau, and "Bombo Pakansa" is Jomo Kenyatta:

> I waited maybe ten minutes in a strange bedroom before Pakansa came. He looked the way he looks in the pictures, but when he took off his clothes his paunch looked really big and ugly. He told me to take off my clothes. He sounded so happy, I kept thinking: Hell, here am I just about to get laid by a head of state. That made me laugh. He thought I was laughing at him.
> "You also think I'm too old, eh? You'll see. I'll teach you how to fuck properly...."
> I still don't know if he entered me. His dick was so soft. But he was contented. He moved around a lot, throwing his bulk up and down and shouting he'd teach me how to fuck properly. (p. 145)

Aimée's irreverence toward a head of state corresponds to Modin's lack of respect for the Jeffersons. The affair between a visiting American student and a head of state, like the one between a foreign student and a professor's wife, is neither convincing nor desirable if taken literally. The novelist establishes some distance between himself and such affairs by making the reader read about them from the notebooks, journals or letters of the characters. For the author, as for the serious critic, the surface details of these sexual encounters cannot be as important as what they suggest, imply or symbolize.

Jomo Kenyatta appears in Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat as "the man with the flaming eyes...[who] was to be known to the world over as the Burning Spear."[35] That was Kenyatta, the embodiment of rebellious energy, nationalistic fervor, and personal magnetism before he got corrupted by post-colonial power. If Robert Fraser's fiction about a "black buck" who "seems to be gifted with almost endless virility" is to be found anywhere in Why Are We So Blest?, it would probably be in Kansa. "If there is fire left anywhere," writes Aimée, "that [Kansa] should be the place"(p. 143). But after Aimée's experiences in Kansa, including the one with Bombo Pakansa, she concludes that "[t]he fire doesn't exist anywhere"(p. 145). The "fire" of "the Burning Spear" all but died with the attainment of Kenya's independence. "His dick was so soft" is an ironic comment on the transformation of "the Burning

Spear" into a post-colonial head of state whose "paunch looked really big and ugly." The observation that it is Pakansa, not Jefferson, whose physical impotence is dramatized provides yet another instance of those ironic reversals that are so important to the appreciation of Armah's novel.

Our knowledge of Armah's oeuvre should alert us to the notion that "impotence" in Armah is overwhelmingly more psychological, intellectual, emotional or moral than physical. And nowhere in Armah is this more so than in Why Are We So Blest?. The novel opens with Solo reviewing his life and coming to the conclusion that he has "become a ghost, wandering...[and] moving with a freedom...whose unsettling abundance [he is] impotent to use"(p. 11). Solo's "impotence" is anything but physical. Indeed, impotence, to Solo, is a function of language: "I kn[o]w how impotent words are, especially words from a person...such as I am"(p. 257). We note, in this connection, that Bombo Pakansa's "impotence" is both affliction and metaphor for fumbling incompetence, while Aimée's history professor suffers from the sort of "impotence" that translates into intellectual dishonesty.

Instead of teaching the history of East Africa, Professor Kaufmann teaches his own fictionalized version of "East African revolts"(p. 185). The fiction that Kaufmann teaches as "history" encourages his students, like Aimée, to "fantasize":

> I fantasize. There is Daddy's relative, the Kapitan Reitsch who went to Africa instead of coming here

> [the United States]....
> I see the Kapitan striding off, not wishing to see me. I'm not another generation of his family. I'm his wife.... Mornings he strides off eagerly into the jungle, ready for his Maji Maji patrolwork.... Europe is ages north. Around us there are only Africans, our servants.... The servants have learned their faithfulness well....
> But inside, there is the boy. He is young. When I'm back in bed I call him away from the others, and he comes in. I tell him to close the door. He obeys. Such a timid creature. He could grow into a fine specimen. (p. 186)

The plight of "[s]uch a timid creature" is highlighted in Ferdinand Oyono's novel, Houseboy. And we can go to Afro-American "folk sources" for "the countless stories...[told] of the male slave called in to wash the mistress' back in the bath, of the Pullman porter invited in to share the beautiful white passenger's favors in the berth, of the bellhop seduced by the wealthy blond guest."[36] Aimée's "fine specimen" is a variation on [Joseph Conrad's] Marlow's "savage who was fireman." "He was," we are told, "an improved specimen."[37] The distinction between fiction and history in Aimée's fantasies, as in Professor Kaufmann's history class, is blurred:

> In class,...Professor Kaufmann's eyes look so scared they start me seeing things. I've imagined holding those eyes captive with the sheer power of mine and making him come to me and stand still while I take his clothes off for him. That makes him stop talking of East African revolts.... Instead of writing he shoots his juice up on the board, writing figures like a bloody YPSL poster.
> MAJI MAJI: 100,000 AFRICANS KILLED.
> He shakes all over when he's finished. (p. 185)

Aimée's imagination provides the link which Kaufmann fails to establish between "AFRICANS KILLED" and the "coming" of the white man. Later, her research in the library gives her evidence to support the claim that the "'hundred thousand figure Kaufmann gave us was a farce'": "'many more Africans'" were killed by the Germans(p. 194).[38] With the professor thus "uncovered," the only way Aimée, the student with a fertile imagination, can tolerate him in class is to "'imagine [she is] crushing his balls'"(p. 196). The "impotence" that afflicts Kaufmann is more intellectual and moral than literal and physical. It is the "completely dry" feeling of "inner sterility"(p. 247) that Armah, the novelist, is interested in and fascinated by. And it is "impotence" in this sense that is explored extensively in Why Are We So Blest?.

We return to the opening sentences of the novel under discussion to make the point that, in Armah's discussion of impotence ("inner sterility") as a kind of spiritual and/or emotional death, theme and structure are intertwined:

> Even before my death I have become a ghost, wandering about the face of the earth, moving with a freedom I have not chosen, something whose unsettling abundance I am impotent to use. There is no contact possible. Life goes on around me. (p. 11)

This is Solo baring his soul to the reader in a mode that draws from the autobiographical and the confessional. Thus, when Solo reads Modin's notebook, he reenacts the reader's experience in reading his [Solo's] account of his life. "After the African's [Modin's] death," observes Solo, "I have seen what of himself he put down in his notebook"(p. 115). Armah, then, dramatizes and, in so doing, makes explicit "an irony implicit in all confessional and autobiographical modes, in which any author is forced by definition to imagine him- or herself to be dead."[39] Solo's fate ("[e]ven before my death I have become a ghost") is Modin's. For both of them, the "inner sterility" which finds symbolic expression in castration is the ultimate "death."

To read Modin's notebook is to read the man as much as reading about the man. In fact, Armah's text makes little distinction between the Modin about whom we read from the pages of his notebook entries, journals and letters, on the one hand, and the "living" Modin who meets with and talks to Solo in Laccryville, on the other: "[s]ometimes, chancing to look at his [Modin's] face, I [Solo] caught him searching mine. I read him, watching me, a specter from an unwanted destiny"(p. 138; emphasis added). "I read him" recalls "I read her"(p. 116). Solo "read[s]" the living Modin and Aimée as avidly and as critically as he "read[s]" about them from their notebooks.

Modin's text--notebook entries, journals and letters--is the "tissue" of his existence, his life. And this, we recall, is what Solo has to say about Aimée's notebook:

> Chance encounters, notes from a variety of sources which might as well, with a small number of exceptions, remain incoherent--the tissue of an aimless existence. (Unnumbered page [71]; emphasis added)

The explicit identification of "text" with "tissue" is echoed or implied in other parts of Why Are We So Blest?. Intertwining Modin's "text," for example, is the "tissue" of Naita's brief appearance in Armah's [meta]text. Before Modin and, by implication, the reader get to know Naita, she announces her desire not to "'be around...too much longer'"(p. 122). But her presence in the novel, however brief, is memorable. She introduces Modin to unforgettable sexual bliss:

> The motion of my body...was something entirely natural, the unavoidable result of everything Naita had done.
>
> We moved together. Each motion told me she felt what I felt. Our end was unforced, natural. She said nothing. I just felt every motion, knew everything.
>
> I cannot feel lonely any more. (p. 123)

This idealized lesson in love-making is not repeated. After this night of reciprocity, Naita will be textualized in Modin's own notebook entries as wish[-fulfilment]. Modin, we read, "wished [Mrs. Jefferson] were Naita"(p. 130). That wish is followed immediately by the realization that "[s]he was not," and the reader senses that Modin spoke too soon when he said "I cannot feel lonely any more."

The reader reads about Naita from Modin's notebook. She "exists" in his text. When Modin writes about Naita, his subject is romanticized: "Naked, Naita is perfect.... I did not know two people could be together so freely, so easily" (p. 122). When Naita speaks for herself, however, it becomes apparent that she is human after all; indeed, all too human:

> I [Modin] told Naita about Mrs. Jefferson. At first she laughed, thinking it was a joke.
> "She's a good friend," I said.
> "She's nothing but a horny white bitch and you know that," Naita said.
> "No. She's really been nice, Naita."

> "Look,...don't start thinking some white bitch gon be your good friend. That's just stupid."
> "But you don't know Mrs. Jefferson."
> "I don't care to know your Mrs. Jefferson."
> (pp. 133-134)

After this conversation, Naita disappears without a trace: she vacates her apartment and abandons her job without leaving a forwarding address at either place. Her absence makes Modin feel a strong desire to "talk to...Naita. I want to talk to you"(p. 134). That burning desire inspires "four letters"; but, since there is no address to send the letters to, those letters function as therapeutic soul-searching in four stages.

The epistolary mode thrives on the absence of the addressee. Modin's letters are written in answer to an overwhelming need to "talk to," or reach out emotionally for the comfort of, a loved one who is absent:

> I am in bed, Naita, in the university hospital. This is my second month here. The first two weeks I was unconscious, and now I am so weak breathing is an effort, but I have needed to reach you....
> [E]very motion requires an enormous effort. This pen is heavy. (p. 153)[40]

Drained physically and emotionally, the need "to reach" Naita is stronger than ever. Modin makes the "enormous effort" to write ("[t]his pen is heavy") because he has to. For the patient's "deeper wounds, the spiritual damage"(p. 159), writing to the absent loved one and confidante is therapy. But since Modin's "disease is ordained," this kind of therapy is little more than the mind's attempt "to create for [the victim or patient] [an] indispensable sustaining illusion" (p. 83). This "sustaining illusion" may be perceived as "indispensable"; but it is nonetheless "[f]iction so hollow, yet needing to believe it [the victim or patient] fill[s] it out, using all the force of youth's clever, selfish righteousness" (pp. 83-84). In technical terms, the foregoing suggests that within the larger context of the autobiographical and confessional modes employed by Modin--modes which, ironically, force him to contemplate, or at least imagine, his own demise --the [therapeutic] epistolary subtext sustains the "illusion" of a presence [the real or imagined addressee] that, in fact, is absent. Each of Modin's letters to Naita is predicated upon her absence, and that absence prefigures Modin's own ultimate absence: his demise, contemplated or imagined in his autobiographical and confessional [intra-] text.

Modin's demise is "arranged" in terms that are both thematic and structural:

> The directions made available to me [Modin] within this arrangement are all suicidal. I am supposed to get myself destroyed out of my own free-seeming choice....
>
> The real question is not whether to commit suicide but how best to invest my inevitable destruction....
>
> Outside of investing my death in an ongoing effort to change things as they are, it wouldn't matter much what kind of death I chose. (p. 31)

Armah's plot puts the reader in a privileged position from which s/he can hardly miss the context, as well as the "literary" implications, of Modin's inevitable self-annihilation.

Immediately following the excerpt above is this notebook entry by Modin:

> I should have stopped going to lectures long ago. They all form a part of a ritual celebrating a tradition called great because it is European, Western, white. The triumphant assumption of a superior community...designed to reduce us to invisibility.... My participation in this kind of ritual made me not just lonely, not just one person unsupported by a larger whole, but less than one person: a person split, fractured. (p. 31-32)

Without the support of "a larger whole," the "lonely" individual becomes "less than one person." "Split" and "fractured" advance the process of disintegration and suggest that the ultimate purpose of this process is to annihilate and, thus, celebrate absence or invisibility. What is pertinent here is that invisibility is discussed explicitly in relation to literary tradition[s]. "The triumphant assumption" and celebration of The Great [European] Tradition reduces everything else "to invisibility."

Why Are We So Blest?, we may recall, is the amalgamation of the [intra-]texts of Solo, Modin and Aimée. Each character lends his/her name to the chapter-segment that focuses on the texere of his/her life. Solo Nkonam is an African trained in Portugal who speaks Portuguese among other languages. To read his text is to read about Lisbon and the Portuguese experience. Modin Dofu is trained in the United States. This African speaks English fluently and, as one would expect, his American experiences color his text. Aimée Reitsch is an American of German extraction whose area of study is African history. To read her text is to read about her German past, her American present, her experiences in Africa, and her Euro-American perspective on things. It is no accident that the English-speaking African, accompanied by his Euro-American girl-friend, meets the Portuguese-speaking African in a French-speaking North African country. It is equally significant that Mzee Nyambura's words, the closest the reader gets to the rhythms of African orature in Why Are We So Blest?, are recorded on the Euro-American's tape for use abroad. The transcript of an interview with Mzee Nyambura appears in Armah's novel as a strand in Aimée's [intra-]text. With Solo's and Modin's lives/texts "unsupported by a larger whole" like the tradition Nyambura draws from, it is understandable that either person feels "lonely," "split," and "fractured." By default rather than by choice, Modin and Solo participate in "a ritual celebrating a tradition" that is "European, Western, white." In terms of the novel's logic, since a "white" tradition by definition blacks out "black," African devotees like Solo and Modin are "reduce[d]...to invisibility." "Naturally," writes Ama Ata Aidoo in this connection, "one would wonder where the African writer who is writing in English, French or Portuguese really stands, since however positively he may be using any of these languages his position is essentially negative."[41] If Modin's or Solo's tragic end is ordained so, it is implied, is the dead-end of "African" literature which celebrates European tradition in European languages. Neither Armah nor Ama Aidoo would support the view that Solo's and Modin's problems arise solely out of bi- or trilingualism. The point has to be made, then, that the issue at stake is one of literary tradition rather than language per se. And I intend to discuss perceptions of contrasting European and African traditions as they emerge from Why Are We So Blest? indirectly, through a reading of Modin's affairs with Naita, Mrs. Jefferson, and Aimée as artistic paradigms, and then directly, through Solo's pronouncements on "[h]ow to be a writer at a time like this" (p. 230).

In what one would consider "serious" literature, descriptions which are explicitly sexual are usually implicitly suggestive of issues much larger than coitus. Armah's descriptions, including sexual ones, are more often than not explicit. We recall the point made earlier on in this chapter, that in the intensity of Armah's perception of the particular the universal is illuminated, and note further that the description of Modin's sexual encounters with Naita, Mrs. Jefferson and Aimée are as explicit as they are paradigmatic. The level of reciprocity which Modin, the African, and Naita, the African-American, attain in love-making, for example, could be read as a romanticized [extended] metaphor for the African and African-American text-making experience as "shared." Modin responds to Naita's call--her touch, feeling, and "motion"--("We moved together. Each motion told me she felt what I felt"[p. 123]). "Shared experience" and "reciprocity" imply a system of mutual support which makes Modin say, in the afterglow of love-making, that he "cannot feel lonely any more"(p. 123). The symbolism of Naita's brief presence and prolonged absence signifies both the need for, and the absence of, a system of mutual support that would have made Modin's life/text something other than the tragic one of "not just one person unsupported by a larger whole, but less than one person: a person split, fractured" (pp. 31-32).

Making love with Mrs. Jefferson is a different affair: "the way she made love...was a friendly frenzy, and I [Modin] could not help it if a part of me stood outside of us, watching her joy that had the motions of agony"(p. 130). "Love-making," in this context, is akin to masturbation. And as if to emphasize this point, the reader is soon treated to a glaring display of the two main elements that define Modin's relationship with Mrs. Jefferson: manipulation and stimulation. Modin and the Jefferson family are travelling by road to Washington for a Conference. Molly takes "the front seat beside her father" while Modin and Mrs. Jefferson share the back seat. Molly begins to read a journal, and soon Mrs. Jefferson decides that she can do with some reading herself:

> "Molly, don't you have anything I could read?"
> "Mummy, I only brought one textbook with me."
> "Forget it." She sat a while, then changed her mind.
> "What's it about?"
> "Coming of age among the Wamakonde."
> "Who on earth are the Wamakonde?"

> "Mummy, I'm reading. Do you want the book?"
>
> "O.K. Give it here."
>
> Mrs. Jefferson held the book in one hand. The other hand she kept under the blankets, like mine. I thought Mrs. Jefferson really intended to read during the trip, till I felt her hand on my thigh.... Mrs. Jefferson groped for my hand first, and found it. She took it and slowly led it back to her own right thigh, then left it there. Her hand returned to my thigh. It played there, slowly, up and down. I looked at Mrs. Jefferson. She did not take her eyes off her book.... I don't know how many miles we went before she had my front quite open....
>
> My hand began its own search.
>
> ....
>
> "Don't read the thing if it makes you blush," Professor Jefferson said suddenly.
>
> "I haven't been blushing," Mrs. Jefferson said.
>
> "You should see yourself now.... It's over an hour since you started blushing. I don't know why you go on if it embarrasses you."
>
> "It doesn't embarrass me."
>
> "It certainly does something to you," Professor Jefferson said. Then he went quiet....
>
> Mrs. Jefferson laughed out loud. "Hey, Molly, this stuff of yours is hot."
>
> "Mummy, I don't read it for pleasure."
>
> "Can't see you reading this as a punishment."
>
> ....
>
> We traveled the rest of the way in silence. A pleasant silence. (pp. 132, 133)

Modin's formality ("Mrs. Jefferson...," "Mrs. Jefferson...," "Professor Jefferson...," and so on), like Mrs. Jefferson's posture of equanimity ("She did not take her eyes off her book"; "'It doesn't embarrass me'"), belies the intimate goings-on. Modin's and Mrs. Jefferson's manipulation of scene, situation, and each other mirrors the novelist's manipulation of the language that creates scene, situation, and character with a view to stimulating the reader's interest. The *message* may very well be in the *massage*. Indeed, with text[book] in one hand and live tissue in the other, Mrs.

Jefferson's fingers clutch both text and the root of the term "text," namely, texere/"tissue." She is in a privileged position to feel "the pleasure of the text." We note further that, to Mrs. Jefferson, "text" is also "pretext." "The Wamakonde" play the same role in Why Are We So Blest? that Dickens's "natives of Borrioboola-Gha" or "the Tockahoopo Indians" play in Bleak House. Dickens's method of "deflation through misnaming"[42] suggests the anonymity of those "natives" and "Indians." Thus, when we read that Mrs. Jellyby, the patroness of the Borrioboola-Gha project, "merely added, with the serene composure with which she said everything, 'Go along, you naughty Peepy!' and fixed her fine eyes on Africa again,"[43] we are expected to translate "Africa" into "empty space." The "Africa" of "Borrioboola-Gha" "natives" is a vacant frivolity for Mrs. Jellyby. Since "the Wamakonde," like the "natives of Borrioboola-Gha," are either invisible, anonymous or unknown ("'Who on earth are the Wamakonde?'"), the "textbook" about them is textualized as pretext for pleasures of a different kind ("'Hey, Molly, this stuff of yours is hot'").

Mrs. Jefferson may appear "'nice'"(p. 134) to Modin; but she cares as little about his well-being as she does the "'[c]oming of age among the Wamakonde.'" Modin himself finds "it hard to think" Mrs. Jefferson is "a woman, a mature one": he "wished she were Naita"(p. 130). The relationship between the professor's wife and the student is not one based on trust, mutual respect, reciprocity and shared experiences. Theirs is a relationship whose pleasurable moments are enabled by the ironic effacement of the participating other. The ultimate irony is that, given the nature of this relationship, both Modin and Professor Jefferson "'[come] of age'" when the latter stabs the former in a desperate bid to regain his wife's [Mrs. Jefferson's] attention and, hopefully, affection.

Aimée is a much more complex character than Mrs. Jefferson. She is both like and unlike the professor's wife. She is like her in seeking vicarious pleasure: "'[a] lot of the time,' [Aimée] said slowly, 'I seem to do O.K. if I can imagine myself into a different scene. It's worked for other things'"(p. 198). At other times Aimée is described in terms that place her closer to Naita than to Mrs. Jefferson:

> I [Modin] was not being foolishly generous. It was not that kind of giving. Nothing was forced; there was no pretense.... Things happened naturally.
> ....
> From [Aimée's] eyes to mine the connection was so real I felt us floating in a medium dense enough to support us both completely.... I have felt strong floods inside me before.... But this had so much power I was not certain it could all be good.... I knew the same strength had possessed her. That energy, coming from us, filled the room. We ourselves were suspended, helpless in its potency. It came from us, but we had become merely a part of it.
> (pp. 193-194)

The unforced naturalness of the fusion of "I" and "she" into "us" and of the two "I's"--like the "connection" between the "eyes"--into "We" suggest both the strong possibility and the energizing potential of a binding relationship between the Euro-American, Aimée, and the African, Modin. The point has to be made though that what is being underlined in the excerpt above are possibility and potential, not actuality. A healthy relationship between Aimée and Modin is feasible; but there are outstanding problems to be overcome, not least of which is the need for Aimée to learn to deal with Modin as partner and Significant Other rather than the self-serving figment of her imagination symbolized by "Mwangi."

The Aimée that the reader sees and hears a lot of in Why Are So Blest? is the "frigid" one. Her reference to her own genitalia as "'dead tissue'"(p. 95) and the characterization of her sexuality in terms such as "'I don't have live tissue'"(p. 197) suggest how self-conscious and defensive she is about her frigidity. The perpetual dryness of her sexual organ is suggestive of her "pallid, boring, lifeless" existence(p. 143): her life has been a frightening "emotional desert"(p. 193). As one would expect, the text of her life is as "dry" as her tissue:

> The [note]book of the American girl [Aimée] does not contain much that promises to be understandable.... Chance encounters, notes from a variety of sources which might as well, with a small number of exceptions, remain incoherent--the tissue of an aimless existence. (Unnumbered page [71])

"Tissue of...existence" recalls "'dead tissue'" and "'live tissue,'" and underscores Armah's explicit identification of "text" with "tissue."

After reading Modin's and Aimée's notebooks, Solo comes to the conclusion that "[i]n these notes I have seen an uncanny complementarity"(p. 116). That observation is important for, within the larger context of Armah's [meta]text, Aimée's "dry" text and Modin's "wet" one ("I have felt strong floods inside me"[p. 193]) complement each other. Both Modin's and Aimée's texts, in turn, complement Solo's: "I [Solo] see myself in the couple [Modin and Aimée]; I see them in me" (p. 232). The plot of Armah's [meta]text integrates such [intra-]textual complementarities and, in this way, turns the multicolored tissue of the intertwining lives of three major characters into the whole, Why Are We So Blest?. Structural complementarity, however, does not guarantee a likable vision. Solo's word "uncanny" alerts the reader to the flawed vision which supports the complementarity he sees in Modin's and Aimée's notes:

> I [Solo] could not have helped him [Modin]. In these notes I have seen an uncanny complementarity. His vision was a complement to hers, hers to his. I read her: a devouring spirit, more than egotistic; her needs blast a path through everything around her. The world she inhabits is bent around her self.
>
> He had no such strong self.... There were constant adjustments of his person to needs impinging on him from outside. His gentleness should not have gone to feed her hardness. (p. 116)

Solo's personal "read[ing]" of Aimée and the latter's equally personal relationship with Modin are put into perspective in a different but related context:

> To be an African now, and a mere artist: to choose to be a parasite feeding on spilt entrails....
>
> The man in me [Solo]: the African absorbed into

> Europe, trying to escape death,...not knowing how deep the destruction has eaten into himself, hoping to achieve a healing juncture with his destroyed people.
>
> There is still a part of me, closer to the girl [Aimée], the consumer of experience, user of people. She played at love; her aim was survival, not union: to survive, a possessor of the experience, not its victim. (p. 232)

The "mere artist," unlike his creative counterpart, is a "parasite," "the consumer of [other people's] experience," and a "victim." He is ill equipped for survival in a literary world of competing myths ("'[t]here are other myths, you know'"[p. 102]) and "a [dominant] tradition....designed to reduce [others] to invisibility"(p. 31). In such a world one "must [c]reate a [s]ystem, or be enslav'd by another [m]an's."[44] Why Are We So Blest? suggests that the West has a tradition or system in place. It is the business of Mr. Richmond Oppenhardt and "The Committee"(p. 119) to maintain, strengthen, and keep the Western tradition dominant. The Jeffersons, Mike, Maria, and Aimée--in spite of herself--derive support from this tradition. People like Modin and Solo, "unsupported by a larger whole"(p. 31), need and have to [re-]create their own system or be turned "into...eater[s] of crumbs in the house of slavery"(p. 84). The inability to help create such a system or tradition is a function of Solo's and Modin's "impotence."

The desert, which provides the setting for Modin's symbolic castration at the end of the novel, emphasizes, at one level of interpretation, the sterility that afflicts those incapable of "creating new worlds in place of poisoned worlds"(p. 149). At another level, one notes that the images which inform Aimée's life/text, namely, "dry," "pallid," "lifeless," and "dead tissue," gain cumulative expression in the "dry desert country"(p. 237) of the concluding sections of the novel where "[e]verything is hard, stony"(p. 278). "Hard" and "stony" are as suggestive of Aimée's frigidity as "dry desert country" correlates to her "emotional desert"(p. 193). As Aimée and Modin move further and further into the "desert country," Modin withers away while Aimée is relatively unaffected by the inhibiting, lifeless environment:

> Every morning for three days now I [Modin] have said to myself we've come to the beginning of the real desert.... Everything is hard, stony.... I slept all night, yet when I woke up I felt tired. The tiredness has grown worse. If it continues I cannot go on. I don't want to go through another argument with Aimée.
>
> We walked apart all day, never together. It's funny that our mental separation should show itself physically. Aimée does not seem at all affected, physically, by this trip.... She looks highly *interested*, in fact. (pp. 278-279)

This couple's "mental [and physical] separation" is as far as one can go from the ideals of reciprocity and shared experience. If Aimée "does not seem...affected...by this trip," it is partly because she has already had to face up to the desert within: "[s]he was no longer the cripple, no longer the girl frightened by the emotional desert, her life till now"(p. 193). Ironically, it was Modin who took upon himself the responsibility to help Aimée turn her "emotional desert" into an oasis of sorts: the "current [that] ran inside" Modin and the "strong floods [he felt] inside"(p. 193) were placed at Aimée's disposal. "'Sounds like the beginning of a suicide pact,'" observes Modin(p. 95). And so it does. Having dissipated his energy in "'resurrect[ing]'" Aimée's "'dead tissue'"(p. 95) and "flood[ing]" her "emotional desert," Modin, in the end, is abysmally unequal to his communal responsibility to help "[create] new worlds in place of poisoned," "hard [and] stony" ones(pp. 149, 278). His death by castration is thus ordained. And this is the ultimate tragedy.

Solo, the "[t]raducteur"(p. 253), translates this tragedy into, and encodes it in, literary terms:

> [T]o be a writer at a time like this, in the midst of the world's most painful truths, a communicator doomed to silence? LE SILENCE DE CHACUN ASSURE LE REPOS DE TOUS.
>
> ....
>
> I am sick with the inability to consume quietly other people's works of art....
>
> Why not simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a Western seer, close my eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration my vocation? Impossible. The Western artist is blest with that atrophy of vision that can see beauty in deliberately broken-off pieces of a world sickened with oppression's ugliness. I hear the call of that art too. But in the world of my people that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to falseness, remains to be done....
>
> My mind in self-protection refuses to follow these thoughts of goodness and a new-created world. From here to there the distance is so great, and my spirit is tired, beaten. (pp. 230, 231)

Like Modin, Solo acknowledges the need for "rearrangement" as the basis for "a new-created world"; but both are too "tired, beaten" to realize this vision. Modin's tragedy is Solo's and, by extension, post-colonial Africa's. The Western artist or seer can afford to "close [his] eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration [his] vocation" because he has a system supported by Western mythology already in place. In the world of Modin and Solo, things have fallen apart and societies as well as individuals feel no longer at ease. There is, therefore, the urgent need for communities, fragmented selves, myths and traditions to be brought together and rearranged for post-colonial times. "That most important first act of creation, [the] rearrangement," is necessary preparation for the creation of this "new...[post-colonial] world."

The African artist's "first act of creation, [the] rearrangement," corresponds to the critic's pre-critical documentation. By the same token, the artist's principal act of creation mirrors the critic's focus on criticism. The surface of Why Are We So Blest? is replete with those details that lend themselves to pre-critical documentation: cultural and racial conflicts, sex, betrayal, politics and revolution, among others. However compelling these surface details may be, the perceptive reader/critic never loses sight of the novel's signalling, signifying depths. After all, one is confronted with a text that is conscious of its own "'level[s] of discourse'"(p. 101). The critic who concentrates his attention exclusively on the surface details of Armah's novel will "'have read everything without understanding anything'"(p. 251). Modin reminds readers that the text "[provokes] a need to go a little deeper under [the] ...surface"(p. 162). And Solo reiterates this reminder: one "[cannot] help seeing more than a surface meaning"(p. 262).

This chapter has demonstrated that we can certainly "[see] more than...surface meaning" if we "go a little deeper under [the] surface" of The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Why Are We So Blest?. Both texts provide evidence to support the claim that Armah's fiction[alizing] incorporates valuable clues for fiction-analyzing. When Armah presents Solo contemplating the writer's vocation "at a time like this, in the midst of the world's most painful truths" in Why Are We So Blest?(p. 230), he underlines another issue that will be discussed in different contexts in the ensuing chapters of this dissertation. The "painful truths" Solo alludes to echo Teacher's "painful kind of understanding... that...in the end...the one remaining truth" resides in "words that mix...beauty with...ugliness, words making... darkness twin with...light."[45]

With varying degrees of emphasis, the succeeding chapters on Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe respond to the question made inevitable by "time[s] like this": should the African novelist "simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a Western seer, close [his] eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration [his] vocation"? Wole Soyinka, for example, finds it difficult, if not impossible, to "close [his] eyes to everything around [him]." For the Nigerian writer, "a time like this" is the "season of anomy," and "the...most painful truths" are the ones about war and imprisonment. In what has been described as "the war quartet"--the play Madmen and Specialists (1970-71), the collection of poems A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972), the "prison notes" The Man Died (1972), and the novel Season of Anomy (1973)--Soyinka couples a sensitive artist's response to "painful truths" with his imaginative diagnosis of the times. We turn next to Season of Anomy in particular.

CHAPTER III

WOLE SOYINKA'S "QUAINT ANOMALY": A CRITICAL APPROACH TO SEASON OF ANOMY

> All a poet can do today is warn.
> --Wilfred Owen, Preface to Collected Poems

> To the... question, How does it feel to be
> a problem? I answer seldom a word.
> --W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk

It has never been easy to interpret Wole Soyinka as poet, playwright, novelist, essayist or critic. The eclecticism of the recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature has elicited multifarious responses from critics and students of literature alike. It is hardly surprising, for example, that essays by Obi Maduakor and Kofi Owusu, like an earlier note by Eldred Jones, bear the same title, "Interpreting The Interpreters," but differ significantly in the interpretative strategy each brings to bear on Soyinka's first novel.[1] There is a measure of continuity between my essay and this chapter: in both cases I emphasize "the fictionality of...Soyinka's... fiction." And in my discussion of Soyinka's fictional account of the signs of the times, my interest in "signs" is the literary critic's, not the political scientist's or the sociologist's. We note, in this connection, that while the continuities I see in Soyinka's two novels may lap over those discussed by Juliet Okonkwo, her "essential unity" in the essay, "The Essential Unity of Soyinka's The Interpreters and Season of Anomy," is not necessarily mine.

Juliet Okonkwo subscribes to Eldred Jones's view that Season of Anomy "can be seen as a development in, rather than a break with, Soyinka's earlier work" and reacts against Gerald Moore's contention that the period of Soyinka's "arrest [and imprisonment] by the Nigerian military authorities" is "clearly marked off from the burst of renewed activity which followed his release in [October] 1969."[2] Okonkwo achieves internal consistency on her own terms: "Soyinka's two novels," she writes, "are united through their common theme of the role of the intellectual in the possible reconstruction in a society that is afflicted with excessive socio-economic and political malaise"(p. 120). While I agree with the critic that "severe compartmentalization of experience and artistic vision"(pp. 110-111) is hardly tenable in the case of Soyinka in particular, I am also of the opinion that "the essential [thematic] unity" she establishes between The Interpreters and Season of Anomy can very easily be sought and found in a combination of relevant texts by, for example, Achebe, Ngugi or Armah. Indeed, the "theme of the role of the intellectual in...reconstruction in a society

...afflicted with...socio-economic and political malaise" is such an obvious staple in the post-colonial African novel that whatever freshness Okonkwo's essay retains owes more to a different set of texts than to hypothesis. And this is the source of my discomfort with the thematic approach.

When we link thematic concerns to formal characteristics and systems of language we are enabled to talk about continuities as well as discontinuities between The Interpreters and Season of Anomy. The scene in The Interpreters in which Barabbas is being pursued by a motley crowd of angry people is worth recalling to make a point apposite to our discussion:

> Barabbas had a good start on his pursuers, and a driver, his car pointed at the fugitive's route had taken a hand. The grim concentration of this man's face left no doubt at all, his aim was to crush the thief's legs.... This might be Lagos and daylight, but he could be killed.
>
> ....
>
> By some strange, imprecise, unthinking agreement the fleeing youth could be killed. The carelessness angered Sagoe, but it excited him also. And it was not merely that he wanted the crowd to learn a lesson... but he had become used to a thinking which required the sharp, violent focussing of dormant problems. Like the casual barbarism of such a crowd, their treachery against those who were momentarily below them in daily debasement.[3]

Pursuers and the pursued, death, "barbarism," "treachery," and "debasement" are, to borrow Juliet Okonkwo's words, "thematic concern[s] of the two novels [The Interpreters and Season of Anomy]"(p. 111). Upon closer examination, however, one notes that the "barbarism" in Season of Anomy is anything but "casual"; nor is "debasement" in the second novel "momentary." People get killed in Season of Anomy not due to "some strange, imprecise, unthinking agreement" but as a result of a strangely familiar, precise, carefully thought out program administered by the Cartel. Language supports quantitative variation on theme[s]. In consonance with the debasement of human life in Season of Anomy, "pursuers" become "the hunting pack"; and the "pursued" assume[s] the identity of "quarry" or "game." A deliberate play on words suggests that "killing" is "play[ing]": "the hunting pack...[participate] in the day-long games of mutilation."[4] "A driver" in The Interpreters who, with "grim concentration..., aim[s]...to crush [a] thief's legs" with his car, is transformed into one of many "[m]otorists" whose "lethal capsules of steel"(p. 242) offer little protection against the Cartel's infinitely more lethal hardware in Season of Anomy. The difference between "car" and "lethal [capsule] of steel" marks the allegorical distance between the world of The Interpreters and that of Season of Anomy. In the imaginative rendition of "a state of anomy"[5] in his second novel, Wole Soyinka utilizes the allegoric mode as a means to speak[ing] about the unspeakable. It is observable, then, that thematic continuities like those established by Juliet Okonkwo between Soyinka's two novels, while useful, nonetheless tend to gloss over linguistic, modal or technical discontinuities. I maintain that Soyinka's interest in interpretation, the language of fiction and the fictionality of fiction is apparent in both of his novels. Thus far there is continuity; but one is enjoined by the criteria of levels of interpretation, appropriate language and apposite strategies of fictionalizing to bring into play uniqueness and, by extension, discontinuity.

The question posed in the previous chapter--how should one read or write a book at a time like this?--is equally relevant to this chapter. The language and the situation are different; but Armah's Solo and Modin and Soyinka's Ofeyi are confronted with choices that are fundamentally the same. "At a time like this," Solo wonders, should the "artist...close [his] eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration [his] vocation?"[6] To Ofeyi, "everything around" is "the outer chaos" while "discrete beauty" translates into "insulated oases of peace." And in a "season of anomy" the desire to "find relief in discrete beauty" is particularly strong:

> It was all so remote. Time out. Time and place way way out.... [W]hat do I [Ofeyi] know of these family scenes, these insulated oases of peace, peace. These microcosms of Aiyéró. A wild improbable idea rose from within...why don't I marry this being [Taiila] and forget the outer chaos. Now, this instant, accept the most tempting interpretation..., impose my own need for peace that passeth all misunderstanding. (pp. 237-238)

If the situation of the artist-figure in Why Are We So Blest? is gloomy and dismal, his visionary counterpart's in Season of Anomy is much worse. As one raises the larger question--how does the sensitive artist translate massacres, imprisonment and war into imaginative work?--one recalls the response of Wilfred Owen, for example, to war. Confronted with the immense destruction caused by World War I, the soldier-artist insists:

> Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.
> My subject is War, and the pity of War.
> The Poetry is in the pity....
>   All a poet can do today is warn.
> That is why the true Poets must be truthful.[7]

Owen sees a new role for the poet occasioned by the demands of the times. The persona in the war-poet's "Strange Meeting" escapes out of battle "Down some profound dull tunnel" and soon finds himself standing "in Hell" and facing the "Strange friend" he had only "Yesterday...jabbed and killed":

> "Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to
> mourn."
> "None," said the other, "save the undone years,
> The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
> Was my life also; I went hunting wild
> After the wildest Beauty in the world,
> Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
> But mocks the steady running of the hour,
> And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
> .... I mean the truth untold,
> The pity of war, the pity war distilled."[8]

For Wilfred Owen, as for Wole Soyinka, "the man died"; but the artist survives in the very act of telling "the truth untold, / The pity of war, the pity war distilled." The truth about war, solitary confinement and torture does not "[lie] ...calm in eyes, or braided hair": it is not "beaut[iful]."

Recollections of war and prison experiences in Season of Anomy are fictionalized and allegorized without necessarily tranquilizing the essence of those recollections. The novel's protagonist notes that "[t]he truth [is] too bare for self deceit, the call for urgent action too strident for any evasion"(p. 141). In "Après la guerre," Soyinka provides support for Ofeyi's observation:

> Do not cover up the scars
> In the quick distillery of blood
> I have smelt
> Seepage from familiar opiates,
> Do not cover up the scars.[9]

As one goes through Soyinka's pluri-generic responses to "a state of anomy" in Madmen and Specialists, A Shuttle in the Crypt, The Man Died and Season of Anomy, the following lines from Gilbert Frankau's "Poison" come to mind:

> You who accuse that I fan
> War's spark from hate's ember,
> Forgive and forget if you can;
> But, I, I remember.[10]

"Crypt," "cell" and "hell" are used as overlapping and interchangeable terms in A Shuttle in the Crypt and The Man Died because Soyinka "remember[s]" that prison, like war, is hell:

> I have watched the most maleficent mask crash through the gates of the Crypt still snorting from recent exertions in Purgatory, then stooping to perform a brief Pilate parody with water from the fire-bucket, turn a gentle farm sprite in a trice.[11]

The "I" is Wole Soyinka; "the...maleficent mask" belongs to a warder; "the Crypt" is [prison-]cell; and the mode is prison memoir. The imprisoned writer leaves the gory details of those "recent exertions" to the reader's imagination because they confound realistic expectations. When the "reality" of war or prison turns out to be more bizarre than fiction, the latter is appropriately allegorized and mythologized. The purgatorial "Temoko" in Season of Anomy, for example, recalls "crypt," "cell," "hell" and real life Kaduna prison. And critics have been quick to point out that Ofeyi's search for Iriyise "in the convoluted bowels of Temoko" (p. 304) remind them of "Orpheus' quest for his beloved Eurydice in the underworld." One notes, however, that beyond what Obi Maduakor describes as the "similarity of nomenclature"--namely, Orpheus-Ofeyi, Eurydice-Iriyise, Cerberus-Suberu--there is, in the final analysis, little to support conclusions other than "Soyinka has not followed the Orpheus myth closely; he only abstracted from the general outline of the story elements that suit his present purpose.... Soyinka has used the myth as a poetic metaphor only."[12]

It is important that we do not make too much of the author's implied reference to the Orpheus myth because there are explicit references to other myths in Season of Anomy. The omniscient narrator refers, for example, to ancient Egyptian myth, Biblical mythology, and the on-going "Cross-river event[s]" in the same breath:

> The moth caress of Iriyise's scented room had not stopped the dreams of Anubis, the jackal-headed one, once he had absorbed the scope of the Cross-river event. He had fallen asleep thinking, this is the fifth face of the Apocalypse, the eighth plague that the Judaic sorcerer had omitted to include--the plague of rabid dogs. (p. 159)

The carnage perpetrated "all over Cross-river" bears comparison with "the plague of rabid dogs." And Zaki Amuri, the ruler of the Cross-river region who orders the carnage, presides over the affairs of his region like the ancient Egyptian god of the dead, "Anubis, the jackal-headed one." The appeal to different myths suggests both universality and timelessness. It is implied that "bestial transformations of the human mind"(SOA, p. 160) are neither new nor peculiar to any particular segment of the globe. Kilgard, the white South African "[expert] on the many refinements of interrogation," "with his hunched back, rheumy eyes and scalpel thin smile" (pp. 142-43), for instance, is the literary descendant of William Shakespeare's "[d]eform'd, unfinished," malfunctioning Richard III. "Season of anomy," by implication, is a tropical variation on "the winter of...discontent." We note also that the "expert" in Season of Anomy is like the "specialist" in Madmen and Specialists. And the philosophy of "As" in the latter play, we recall, translates into "As, Was, Is, Now, As Ever Shall be."[13] "The bestial transformations of the human mind" that take place during seasons of anomy or winters of discontent and produce "madmen and specialists" "[Were]," "[Are]" and presumably "Ever Shall be." Soyinka, the critic and essayist, speaks for Soyinka, "myth-maker" and writer of imaginative literature:

> For my part, as a writer, myth-maker and critic, I invoke such reminders on a metaphoric level.
> ....
> Whether as Alfred Jarry's King Ubu, Rasputin, Shakespeare's Richard III, allegories of terrorizing monsters and captive communities, Achebe's Chief Nanga, Sembene's Colonial Factor, my Dr. Bero, or even mythical constructs such as Ogun, the writer

> structures into controllable entities--being careful in most cases to give no utopian answers--these faces of ideality, be they evasively disguised as State, Divinity, the Absolute or History.[16]

"Allegories" and "mythical constructs" imply what "metaphoric level" makes explicit: that in Soyinka, the perceptive reader or critic is invited to appreciate levels of meaning. This multivocal imperative informs the language, action and structure of Season of Anomy.

The action of Soyinka's second novel takes the reader through "febrile chamber[s] of grief," a "grotto"(p. 271), and "a low long crypt" which looks and "'feels like a subterranean camp'"(p. 268). Readers and fictional characters alike wonder "[h]ow many more of such catacombs [await] discovery" (p. 271). But it becomes apparent soon enough that above- and underground function as objective spatial correlatives for allegory's literal and symbolic levels of meaning, on the one hand, and for primary and secondary levels of signification, on the other. Critical appraisal of action and allegory in Season of Anomy corresponds to digging below the [novel's] surface to reveal or extract meaning.

Allusive biblical language like "'angels...with the flaming sword'"(p. 108), "the scorched imprint of the awakened beast of revolt"(p. 110), "'the man who has sold [his] birthright for a mess of pottage'"(p. 121), and "'Why come ye upon our peaceful people with such...devilish instruments of war'"(p. 130) supports the rendition of the four-man Cartel in terms such as "the four-headed beast that trampled [the victims'] dignity with iron hooves"(p. 132). This is the register of religious allegory. In this instance, however, Chief Batoki, Chief Biga, Zaki Amuri and the Commandant-in-Chief, the four heads of the Cartel-beast, are "not faceless, not without flesh and blood"(p. 143). If we remember, as Obi Maduakor obviously does, that "[t]he Cross-river head of the Cartel, Zaki Amuri," for example, "has many of the attitudes of the Mafia-feudalist reactionary in...Nigerian politics of the 1960s,"[15] then we can better appreciate the fusion of religious allegory, allegorical satire and political allegory in Season of Anomy. In the context of the novel as a whole, this allegoric fusion reflects the blending of fact, fiction and myth into a powerful imaginative work whose impact is far greater than the sum of its parts.

The "blending" of "parts" is given modal flavor in the novel under discussion. It is apparent from our discussion so far that Madmen and Specialists, A Shuttle in the Crypt, The Man Died and Season of Anomy feed upon each other. Of particular relevance at this stage is the observation that the author of the play, the collection of poems, and the prison notes is very much in evidence in the novel. When Obi Maduakor, for instance, analyzes excerpts from Season of Anomy and comes to the conclusion that "[t]he prose moves with a measured cadence, enlisting familiar poetic devices such as alliteration, consonance, internal rhyme, [and] onomatopoeia," he substantiates the claim that "Soyinka's language is poetic."[16] Usually, however, the poetic language is brought into sharp relief by the reportage of the essayist:

> Ofeyi was somewhat surprised at the passion of his resentment. The pattern was wearisomely familiar. A violent change of government, the new leaders courted recognition from neighbouring power, offered dowry in the form of wanted fugitives from that area of repression. Sometimes trussed and wrapped like mailbags. And dossiers complete with aliases, photos, activities and lists of connections. Dirty deals, the old bargaining in human flesh, a slave market among the middlemen of the black continent, perpetuating their historic role in a lucrative betrayal of their own...flesh. (p. 103)

The "passion" may be Ofeyi's, but the "resentment" is Wole Soyinka's. Indeed, on this plane of "resentment," Soyinka stands shoulder to shoulder with unlikely allies like Chinweizu, Madubuike and Jemie, on the one hand, and congenial allies like Armah, Ama Aidoo and Achebe, on the other. Whatever their differences, African writers stand united in their "resentment" at the "wearisomely familiar" "pattern" of post-colonial "violent change of government," "repression," and "betrayal." It is this "resentment" which transcends polititical ideologies and schools of thought that is dramatized in Soyinka's second novel.

In Season of Anomy, Soyinka, in effect, tells his readers "[l]et us go then, you and I"[17] through "'a subterranean camp'"(p. 268) so you feel the effect of confinement, through "Curfew Town"(p. 130) so that "curfew" will be more of an experience than a mere word, through "'Death Cells'"(p. 295) and "'the Lunatic Yard'"(p. 302) so you see for yourself how organized massacres destroy body and mind, and through "the formal doorway to the territory of hell"(p. 192) the better to appreciate "hell" both as metaphor and apt description of the "hellish" results of pogrom. Soyinka, the novelist, is, at heart, a dramatist. And the description of a massacre by "predatory gangs" at a town called "Kuntua" shows the dramatist coming into his own in the fictional world of Season of Anomy:

> The action unravelled with chilling clarity. It had a definable beginning, a middle and an end. It began almost as a game, with the weaving and dodging among the houses and passages, expanded into a co-ordinated sweep as the hide-and-seek was jettisoned and the mob rushed into the churchyard, made instantly for doors and windows and began to slam them shut. ... Each move seemed choreographed, even to the last detail.
> ....
> Each act progressed from the last [one] with bewildering precision. (pp. 197, 198, 199; emphasis added)

"Action" and "a definable beginning, a middle and an end" belong to both the novel and the play; but "act" as "Act" and choreography are borrowed from the stage. Indeed, there are instances in Season of Anomy of Soyinka's obvious impatience with the traditional novelistic mode:

> Why do you insist on calling our country Aiyéró? Say --Aiyéró. Ró! If you find the world bitter don't foist your despair on us.... Ofeyi mumbled his apologies, then grew querulous in turn... why do you make such fuss about a little tonal deflection? Ah, the old man [Pa Ahime] wagged his head, it tells a lot you see. It isn't only that you change the meaning to what it isn't,... but it tells a lot of your state of mind. You've been defeated by life and it

shows in your tone. (p. 8)

On the printed pages of the novel, there is no difference between "Aiyéró" and "Aiyéró." The "tonal" difference Pa Ahime insists upon can certainly be made apparent by a speaking voice like that of an actor on the stage. Pa Ahime is like an older, wiser Hamlet giving an actor good advice before he puts him on stage to act out his part in a play intended to "catch the conscience of" the Cartel. Soyinka's impatience with the traditional form of the novel is very much in character and also in tune with [post-]modernist trends. In his first novel "Soyinka creates interpreters who express themselves through the fine arts--music (Joe Golder), painting (Kola), and sculpture (Sekoni)."[18] And it is apparent from the foregoing that in the second novel the author underscores the simultaneity of multiple modes of artistic expression.

What has been described and discussed earlier on either as Season of Anomy's "levels of meaning" or "multivocal imperative" finds expression in plurisignification. The novel is basically about processes of displacement, elimination and substitution. The defenders of the Aiyéró idea[l] seek initial displacement and eventual elimination of the Cartel menace. It is hoped that ultimately the Aiyéró idea[l] will replace the state of anomy inaugurated by the Cartel. The Cartel, for its part, is fiercely committed to stifling what is perceived to be disruptive ideas emanating from Aiyéró and eliminating the carriers of those ideas. The Cartel's ultimate goal is to overrun pockets of resistance and totalize its [strangle]hold on the state. The novelist uses metonymy, synecdoche and metaphor as tropes of displacement, elimination and substitution.[19] The resultant tropic clash signifies the violence engendered by the clash of opposing Aiyéró and Cartel viewpoints. In Soyinka's fictional world violence is as much in the language as it is "out there."

The titles of the five sections which make up Season of Anomy, namely, "Seminal," "Buds," "Tentacles," "Harvest" and "Spores," are metaphors for the introduction, nurturing and propagation of ideas considered seminal by either the Cartel or the champions of the Aiyéró ideal. It is open season for conflict. And the conflict of ideas in particular is mirrored by figurative language. Aiyéró is built upon communalism. Its people owe allegiance to "the Custodian of the Grain"(p. 3). By choice and by orientation the citizens of Aiyéró are bound to nature and the natural, not to violence and the abnormal. But Aiyéró represents one of two opposing sides in Season of Anomy. Those of "the other side know what they do is abnormal, it is against nature. And so they are compelled to act together as an abnormal but organic growth"(p. 118). Given this state of affairs, citizens of Aiyéró commit themselves to a new order. In the ensuing clash of imagery and ideas, "the men of Aiyéró sowed their seeds in the soil of the new communal entity"(p. 88) while representatives of the opposing side "'have been ringing [Aiyéró] fields in steel'" (p. 118) and doing some sowing of their own: "Batoki sowed a forest of bayonets in the sun, laughed through the curses of the people and mocked their tears of frustration"(p. 139). The Aiyéró "seed" symbolizes the "eternal community of feeling which...sought to transcend limitations of trampled self and transform it, in union with others, into a weapon for aid or destruction of distant forces"(p. 133). And the Cartel's "steel" and "bayonets" are emblems of naked, aggressive power. The subjects of the Custodian of the Grain strive to replace "steel" and "bayonets" with seeds of new ideas, while the Cartel and its lieutenants are dedicated to substituting those seeds with more "steel" and "bayonets" in order "to preserve their potency and guarantee a lasting ascendancy over a people that had lately begun to rumble and shift under their feet"(p. 133).

Neither of the two warring sides in the novel succeeds in uprooting the other. It is also implied that reconciliation between the two parties is not possible. In the anomic season of never-ending conflicts and rivalries, either combating party attributes to itself the wholeness or totality which is denied by both the nature of its own existence and the existence of the other party. Thus, on the one hand, Aiyéró is a "microcosm [that holds] the secret of a living harmony" and "[overrides] fortuitous idiocies of the new land spawns—the bureaucrats, the marionettes of power, soldiers and politicians, the technocrats and currency expounders"(p. 175). And, on the other, the Cartel has "tentacles" that are "long"(p. 86) enough to go on "contagious rampage"(p. 306) and leave "universal deathness"(p. 222) in their trail. In the macrocosmic projections of the "microcosm" (the part), the warring other--the "soldiers...politicians [and] the technocrats" who represent the Cartel--is overriden and eliminated through the ascendancy of the Aiyéró whole. Similarly, the tentacular other's--the Cartel's--"contagious rampage" and "universal deathness" leave no room for "insulated oases of peace.... These microcosms of Aiyéró"(p. 238). The novelist, in this way, explores and exploits the ambivalence that defines synecdochic signification: part (like "hands") signifies whole ("workers"), and whole (like "wardrobe") signifies part ("clothes"). "'In the face of every dead form,'" the reader is reminded, "'there is something of all the humanity one has known, man or woman'"(p. 227). That synecdochic principle is important to our understanding of the death-dealing world of Season of Anomy in which characters are sometimes identified by body parts that are either missing or not functioning:

> Three figures stood by the board, one the figure Ofeyi had observed, his nose eaten away.... The second figure was nearly blind. A third had rested his mud-padded crutch against the wall and was clutching at a bowl with both hands. Stumps, in strict accuracy.
>
> They [the stumps] were smooth..., but they fastened to the sides of the bowl more tenaciously than any ten fingers. The noseless one was intent on pulling it [the bowl] away.

> ....
> Gub-nose continued to stare at Stumps. Soon only his bowl was left on the board. (p. 297)

"Stumps" and "the noseless one"/"Gob-nose" are "figures" more of thought (tropic) than of speech (rhetorical). The "figure" --"Gob-nose" or "Stumps"--is the trope, the synecdoche. The dismemberment and dehumanization that characterize these "figures" are associated with the Cartel's "contagious rampage." The association is made explicit: these "figures" are in the Temoko Wards created by the Cartel and maintained by its minions. Body parts, "debris of faces"(p. 196), and dehumanized "figures" constitute the visible part that bears testimony to the Cartel-administered "universal deathness" (p. 222; emphasis added).

To deal with the Cartel's organized massacres, the proponents of the Aiyéró ideal are unavoidably drawn to taking "control of...violence and direct[ing] it with a constructive economy":

> The self-confessed assassin [Demakin, the Dentist] was saying, 'There is a pattern even to the most senseless [killing]. All that we must do is take control of that violence and direct it with a constructive economy. Our people kill but they have this sense of selectiveness. They pick the key men, but they also kill from mere association. An agent is marked down for death. An informer is butchered. We cannot stop it even if we want no part of such righteous vengeance.' (p. 111)

Demakin is licensed to kill to protect and defend the Aiyéró ideal. His opposite number is Chief Biga, "'the hatchet-man of the Cartel'"(p. 63). Demakin is called "the Dentist" because of "his unassailable logic of extraction before infection. Extract the carious tooth quickly, before it infects the others"(p. 92). In the novel's tropic language, killing "from...association" is a metonymic act. The term for something (like the Cartel) is applied to another ("an agent" or "informer") with which it is associated. In this metonymic war of displacement, killing the Cartel's associates--"agent[s]" and "informer[s]"--translates into ground gained in the attack on the Cartel itself. Association and displacement are linked in the Dentist's insistence that

> 'self-defence is not simply waiting until a lunatic attacks you with a hatchet. When you have watched his attack on a man up the road, you don't wait any longer.' (p. 134)

Defending oneself by association ("[w]hen you have watched [an] attack on a man up the road") complements "kill[ing] from...association" as strategies in the Aiyéró-Cartel battle of and over bodies, minds and idea[l]s. The reader is invited to associate the Dentist's "hatchet"-wielding "lunatic" with the Cartel's "hatchet-man," Chief Biga, through verbal echo. And already a chain of metonymic signification is apparent: a man who wields a hatchet with "lunatic" regularity, or often enough to be closely associated with it, is called a "hatchet-man." To the Dentist, this "hatchet-man" is "the carious tooth" that must be extracted "quickly, before it infects...others." "Extract [this] carious tooth" and you eliminate the "hatchet-man"; eliminate the "hatchet-man" and you get rid of the "lunatic"; rid yourself of this particular "lunatic" and you will have amputated the hatchet-wielding "arm of the Cartel"(p. 138); excise its armed "arm" and you are "killing" the Cartel itself by association. But at this juncture, the association is so close that the metonymic chain gets hooked up to the novel's chain of synecdochic signification. The Cartel's "strong 'arm'" is closely associated with its--the Cartel's--murderous activities (through metonymic signification) and is also the part that most appropriately represents the [Cartel-]whole (through synecdochic signification). In a novel whose action takes the reader above- and underground, the critic is expected to plod through a maze of plurisignification.

If the conflict in Season of Anomy had been allegorized into a simple one between natural and abnormal, good and evil, Soyinka's novel would have lost some of its disturbing impact. Availing itself of the services of Demakin, "the self-confessed assassin," is only a symptom of the "quaint[ness]" of the "anomaly" introduced as Aiyéró in the novel's opening paragraph. Aiyéró, the "oas[i]s of peace"(p. 238), is itself a product of violence: "'[t]he founding history of Aiyéró had its roots in violence'"(p. 23). This "quaint anomaly"(p. 2) in Season of Anomy manifests itself in ways that are predictable in their irregularity and oddity:

> 'Violence is not what I [Ofeyi] want from here [Aiyéró]. Just the same, the sowing of any idea these days can no longer take place without accepting the need to protect the young seedling, even by violent

means.' (p. 23)

"The young seedling" needs protection from the Cartel and its forces. The means of both offense and defense, however, is the same: violence. Furthermore, "the Aiyéró ideal [is to be] disseminated with the same powerful propaganda machine of the Cartel throughout the land"(p. 19). "Same" undermines Aiyéró's claim to an alternative vision--something new, different --while "propaganda machine" is at odds with Aiyéró idealism. One of the lessons Ofeyi learns during his encounter with Suberu in the novel's concluding section, "Spores," is that a new idea calls for "a new idiom"(p. 315).

Supporters and exponents of the Aiyéró ideal are personifications of "quaint anomaly." As employees of the Cocoa Corporation, Ofeyi ("the promotions man"[p. 2]), Zaccheus (leader of the Cocoa Beans Orchestra) and Iriyise (the "Cocoa Princess"[p. 45]) work ostensibly for and practically against the Cartel's interests; but previous and/or current association with the Cartel means that, like Aiyéró, their "'history ...[has] its roots in violence'"(p. 23). And this history, for Ofeyi in particular, is linked to "past association" of a different kind:

> The enemy to him [Ofeyi], was not faceless, not without flesh and blood. Ties. Even pleasant recollections of past association. Batoki especially he knew, had supped often at his family board, even flirted inconclusively with his precocious daughter, Biye.
> (p. 143)

Apart from this "precocious daughter," the other children of

Chief Batoki, the Cartel's "strategist"(p. 142), call Ofeyi "Uncle." In an ironic comment on the prostitution of "a virtue adapted from tradition" and the irrelevance of what Obi Maduakor describes as "an already predetermined schema:... either good or bad,"[20] the narrator informs the reader that the white South African "expert," Kilgard, has become "so much one of the [Batoki] family that...[the Batoki children] also [call] him Uncle"(p. 143). "Uncle" in such a context is a verbal sign of the anomic times.

The paradox which defines Aiyéró and characterizes Ofeyi is explicitly associated with Taiila. She is said to be "[a] frail figure of paradox"(p. 97) with a "paradoxical face"(p. 99). She is both woman and "child"(p. 237), "a mixture of adolescence and experience"(p. 99). Her role in the novel is captured in A Shuttle in the Crypt by the poem "Recession (Mahapralaya)." ("In Hindu metaphysics," Mahapralaya is said to represent "the return of the universe to its womb." In Soyinka's poem it "expresse[s]...the consoling experience of man in the moment of death, the freeing of his being from the death of the world.")[21] The Mahapralaya essence is recalled in Taiila's characterization: "[h]er kindliness seemed... generous and roomy. Instinctively Ofeyi felt that she could accommodate all the world on her knees and yet remain unruffled. Hands, brow and eyes of radiating calm and paradoxical alertness"(p. 237). Taiila's relationship with her brother, Chalil, and mother, Mrs. Ramath, encourages Ofeyi to think about "these family scenes, these insulated oases of peace. . . . These micrccosms of Aiyéró"(p. 238).

An Indian family maintaining an "oas[i]s of peace" on an African waste land is as quaint an anomaly as Aiyéró. Significantly, this family is an offshoot of a parent tree that is defective. To Ofeyi's question "Why have you remained--after all that happened?" Chalil replies:

> 'Oh I don't know. Guilt? A need to make some compensation. I can't help feeling that there is a chain-reaction in all this. My father is first and foremost a businessman. One of the richest men in Calcutta. He doesn't much care what sort of associates he makes. Profits Mr. Ofeyi. Profits. That is my old man's one philosophy. He had no scruples. He got on very well with your political leaders.' (pp. 231-32)

The alliance of businessmen and political leaders serves the Cartel as well as it does Chalil's father. The Indian businessman and the local Cartel are equally unscrupulous in their pursuit of "Profits." The businessman's son's "guilt" by association must be felt by the daughter and the wife, Taiila and Mrs. Ramath respectively. "Oases of peace" in Season of Anomy have their roots in the novel's version of original sin, namely, violence in one form or another. In fact, Chalil, who is a medical officer and therefore a "healer" by profession, is prepared to use violence to protect his neighbor--the mining engineer--from his assailants. The doctor's action finds expression in one of those tropic capsules that are intended to do violence to language: "'Shoot to heal'"(p. 251).

In the end, it is left to Demakin, the Dentist, to sum up the role of Aiyéró and personifications of the Aiyéró ideal in a "season of anomy": "'Nothing much. We merely harnessed chaos to our own ends'"(p. 317). This conclusion echoes Ofeyi's earlier observation that "'[t]he storm was sown by the Cartel.... Unless we can turn the resulting whirlwind against them, we are lost'"(p. 24). If Ofeyi and Demakin are on the same side and seem to speak the same language, it is because they are "kindred spirits." What distinguish the idealistic quester-protagonist from "the self-confessed assassin" are "details of scruple":

> Ofeyi watched, admiring his [Demakin's] nerve. Except for details of scruple, he found himself increasingly accepting the fact that they were kindred spirits. (p. 136)

In the novel's moral frame of reference, those "details of scruple" place Ofeyi closer to Taiila than to both his "kindred [spirit]" and Taiila's father who "had no scruples." Taiila is, however, tied to her father by blood and, in a related context, Ofeyi is linked to Chief Batoki by "past association." But--and this distinction is important--it is circumstance that ties Ofeyi to Taiila and Demakin.[22] The three characters meet abroad just about the same time, and that meeting--the one between Ofeyi and Demakin in particular --is linked to Pa Ahime and Aiyéró (p. 216). It would appear to be the case, then, that circumstances in Season of Anomy dictate a four-pronged--philosophical (Pa Ahime), intellectual (Ofeyi), moral (Taiila) and military (Demakin)--attack on "the four-headed beast," the Cartel (p. 132). In a "season of anomy," one may be inclined to advocate quaint anomalies like revolutionary pacifism and dynamic peace; but the novelist certainly feels uncomfortable with a situation in which violence is employed as a means to end violence. And that discomfort becomes a function of language: a doctor or healer who "'shoot[s] to heal'"(p. 251) does as much violence to figurative language as does a mass murderer who "sow[s] a forest of bayonets"(p. 139).

Quaint linguistic and thematic anomalies mirror structural ones. In a state of anomy, it is implied, conventional novelistic expectations are as inappropriate as, for example, the lyricism of the "finely trained Georgian voice" was to the carnage of World War I. Soyinka's apparent discomfort with, while working within, the novelistic medium makes Season of Anomy, like Aiyéró, "a quaint anomaly." We have already seen how the interplay of the Eliotic "Let us go then, you and I" motif, Pa Ahime's interest in tonal inflection, and the narrator's utilization of "choreographed" "[A]ct[s]" in his descriptions suggests the playwright coming into his own and reacting, by implication, against constraints imposed by the traditional form of the novel. We note now that the fictional characters in Soyinka's second novel reject the very mode that brings them into being:

> Ofeyi glanced at the suitcase. 'Yes...to quote a title from the world of fiction--mission accompli?'

> The youth [Demakin] smiled.... 'I'm afraid I am not familiar with the world of fiction. In fact, I rather despise it.' (pp. 101-102)

Later, Ofeyi in turn warns Taiila not to "'look for lines of ...tragic romance...on [his] face'"(p. 242).

Season of Anomy ends with the unanswered question "what next?" and the ambiguous "'understand[ing]'" that there will be a meeting of some sort "'at the next intersection'"(p. 320) in a time span not covered by the novel. This inconclusive conclusion is both deliberate and functional. It is no accident that the reader is reminded in Season of Anomy that a literary text must have "a definable beginning, a middle and an end"(p. 197). This reminder ensures the reader's more than usual anticipation of "a definable...end" to the novel under discussion. Thus alerted, the reader can hardly miss the denial of his expectation. His predictable disappointment is meant to reflect the author's irritation at conventional or traditional novelistic endings in particular and expectations in general. Soyinka's is a novel whose sympathies and affinities are with "'works [left] unfinished...deliberately'":

> 'I always thought' Ofeyi commented, 'what a pity if the bridge was ever completed. It was perfect as it was, dangling in nowhere. Those painters and musicians who left some works unfinished, I suspect they did it deliberately.' (p. 172)

A "'bridge'" left "'dangling'" in the void ("'nowhere'") is an architectural representation of "'works [left] unfinished ...deliberately.'" And a literary text "left...unfinished...

deliberately" provides a structural analogue to the fictional account of an anomic season of violence and destruction whose impact is still felt, whose consequences are being assessed. The artist cannot presume that he has the final word on war, imprisonment and violence, on the one hand, and peace, freedom and justice, on the other. That there is more than one side to the issues raised by Season of Anomy is reflected in the author's use of the ambiguous and the ambivalent, the symbol's potentially inexhaustible range of reference, and allegory's primary and secondary levels of signification.

"A war, with its attendant human suffering," writes Wole Soyinka in The Man Died, "must, when that evil is unavoidable, be made to fragment more than buildings: it must shatter the foundations of thought and re-create."[23] Soyinka's "re-creat[ion]" of "human suffering" in Season of Anomy "fragment[s] more than [structure]": the novelist's language "shatter[s] the foundations of [conventional] thought." We saw in the previous chapter how Armah's concern with the metaphor of fragmentation in The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments provides the backdrop for the emphasis on "re-creat[ion]" in Why Are We So Blest?. Coming after Soyinka and Armah, the latter's compatriot, Ama Ata Aidoo, for her part, suggests that being female and Black "at a time like this"[24] are good enough reasons for her to "shatter the foundations of thought and re-create." She goes for the kill in Our Sister Killjoy.

CHAPTER IV

CANONS UNDER SIEGE: BLACKNESS, FEMALENESS, AND AMA ATA AIDOO'S OUR SISTER KILLJOY

> [T]here is a Eurocentric view that the movement for women's liberation is not indigenous to Asia or Africa, but has been a purely West European and North American phenomenon, and that where movements for women's emancipation...have arisen in the Third World, they have been merely imitative of Western models.
>
> --Kumari Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World

> The process of correcting the portrayal of Black women has involved both the creative writer and the scholar-critic, and oftentimes one person serves both functions.
>
> --Stephen Henderson, Introduction to Black Women Writers (1950-80)

The Creator Created Wo/man, didn't S/he?

> Definitions [belong] to the definers--not the defined.
>
> --Toni Morrison, Beloved

Gender and race provide a linkage which sponsors the emphasis on "womanism" rather than "feminism" and underwrites the resulting preference for femaleness at the expense of femininity.[1] It is not assumed that there is a preexisting, monolithic entity called "African or Black 'womanism,'" on the one hand, and "Western 'feminism,'" on the other. Indeed, it becomes apparent later on in this chapter that the "feminist perspective that is, at the same time, humanistic and interdisciplinary, unlimited in scope and universal in application,"[2] is not at odds with Alice Walker's "[t]raditionally universalist" womanist perspective. Both perspectives transcend the limitations of radical, feminist-separatist ideology. What is often described as "Black/African feminism" will be referred to in the ensuing pages as "womanism." "Radical" or "extremist" will be used to premodify "womanism" and "feminism" wherever appropriate. The term "womanist-feminist" or "womanist/feminist" will signify the merger of [Black] womanist and [Western] feminist perspectives.

There are certainly some gender-oriented and historically-sanctioned problems with which women of all races have had, and continue, to contend. It is also clear that there isn't much hard evidence to support the contention that "where movements for women's emancipation...have arisen in the Third World, they have been merely imitative of Western models." The broad sweep of Kumari Jayawardena's "study...[of] the rise of early feminism...in selected [African and Asian] countries...in the late 19th and early 20th centuries," and the particularity of Adelaide Cromwell's biography of "An African Victorian Feminist" provide a couple of apposite examples which complement each other in challenging the view that "the movement for women's liberation is not indigenous to Asia or Africa."[3] It is true, however, that less than adequate attention has been paid to "women's emancipation" in African writing.

The discussion of Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* in the preceding chapter, for example, had little to say about the female characters in that novel for the apparent reason that Iriyise, Mrs. Ramath and her daughter Taiila, and Mama Biye and her daughter Biye never really come alive as characters in their own right. Mrs. Ramath and Mama Biye are closeted in anonymous domesticity. The little that we see of Mrs. Ramath's relationship with her daughter suggests that it is as peaceful as the one between the Biyes is tempestuous. When Taiila, for instance, is not being "paradoxical" she is functioning as symbol, and in both cases she is more *enigma* than convincing *character*.

Eustace Palmer comes to mind at this juncture because of his surprising observation that the reader meets Mama Biye "only once, and yet Soyinka's presentation is so sure that no one can deny...she is forcefully *there*."[6] It is instructive to recall from Soyinka's text what Palmer sees as his "sure" "presentation": "An enormous figure of a woman [Mama Biye] loomed over him [her husband, Chief Batoki], her lips vibrating in an incessant sizzle over the unfortunate chief"; "She burst into a prolonged artificial laughter which bordered on hysteria, [and] broke it off suddenly to scream"; "She was mounting rapidly towards that pitch of hysteria...which ...was only too painfully familiar. In that state, anything could happen"; culminating in

> a bellow of animal rage tore through the room as with the shout 'Liar!' the mother flung herself on Biye [the daughter] who went down heavily under the unexpected attack....
> She lashed out with her foot, Biye rushed her hands upwards to protect her face and felt her mother's shin across her knuckles. The demented woman now attempted to dig her heel in the girl's stomach. ... A final kick...took Biye in the ribs.[5]

In this way, Mama Biye, the "hyster[ical]" "mother" and "demented woman," "struts and frets...upon the [limited domestic] stage" allotted her and then she "is heard no more." This woman is "forcefully there" more as Choleric Humo[u]r in a Comedy of Humo[u]rs than a credible character in a novel.

The reader sees and hears more of Iriyise than of any other female presence in Season of Anomy. And yet one does not learn much about who she really is from the time she is "'pluck[ed]...out of brothels'"(p. 219) to become a symbol (Cocoa Princess) within a symbol (Cocoa-pod) till the end of the novel when she is rescued fron Temoko in a presumably symbolic "'very deep coma'"(p. 318). Indeed, Ofeyi's search for her "in the convoluted bowels of Temoko"(p. 304) replicates the reader's search for Iriyise's identity through a labyrinthine chain of signifiers which yields no meaningful signified. Iriyise is variously referred to as "Iridescent" (p. 38), "Queen Bee of the hive"(p. 58), "Cocoa Princess"(p. 59), "The 'Celestial Certainty'"(p. 61), "caged tigress," "Firebrand," and so on. As "a woman [who] [i]sn't a woman," she is said to belong to both "myth" and "legend"(p. 62). The impression one gets is that one cannot really know Iriyise: it is, indeed, futile to try to. She is much closer to the equally elusive Simi in The Interpreters than she is to Sidi who, in spite of whatever shortcomings there may be in her portraiture, is convincingly there in The Lion and the Jewel.

What we have in Season of Anomy, then, are not female characters in the round at all, but manifestations of a female principle that at worst is crudely earthy--as manifested in the Biyes--and at best expressive of the Earth Mother:[6]

> Iriyise abandoned the circuit of Ilosa's lights, the earth of Aiyéró held her deeper than any bed of eiderdown.
>
> In wrapper and sash with the other women of Aiyéró, her bared limbs and shoulders among young shoots, Iriyise [could be seen] weaving fronds for the protection of the young nursery, bringing wine to the sweating men in their struggle against the virgin forest.... Now she could even tell a blight on the young shoot apart from mere scorching by the sun. Her fingers spliced wounded saplings with the ease of a natural healer. Her presence, the women boasted, inspired the rains. (p. 20)

Somewhere between "the demented woman" (Mama Biye), the harlot (what Iriyise used to be at Ilosa) and the embodiment of Mother Earth whose "presence...inspire[s] the rains" (what Iriyise becomes), the self-supporting, decision-making woman is missing.[7] It is this void which African women writers have been trying to fill. This chapter is devoted to Ama Aidoo's attempt to rescue the African woman from the fringes of African literature and restore flesh, blood, voice and credibility to her. The following segment on gender and the ones on the discontinuities as well as continuities between womanist-feminist perspectives, on the one hand, and African literature, on the other, are intended to provide a broad enough framework for the discussion of the rather unusually eclectic Our Sister Killjoy.

The Gender Principle and the Signifiers "Black" and "White"

> In writing...the gender of the page remains to be determined, and so too does the pen that cleaves its virgin surface.
> --Maud Ellmann, "Blanche"

Maud Ellmann's essay "Blanche" offers "a psychoanalytic reading" of The Book of the Duchess.[8] Chaucer's "Book" is a dream-poem about "'the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse'"(p. 100), and Ellmann's Freudian interpretation of the text allows her to suggest that "Blanche stands for the whiteness of the page, [while] the Black Knight represents the ink with which it is deflowered"(pp. 106-107). "White" and "Black," in this context, are shot through with the mutability evident in the sponsoring chess conceit:

> The signifiers 'black' and 'white' shuffle back and forth between the genders in the same way that black and white change places in a game of chess. (p. 107)

Ellmann makes the point that "chess is a game of places and displacements," and implies that in the gender game woman-as-Blanche is "blanched out in the very word that brings her into being"(p. 110). Her Freudian interpretation of Chaucer's book provides a backdrop for the reminder that what "Chaucer calls 'White' Freud calls darkness, as in the phrase 'dark continent' of femininity. Both signify erasure, a whiting or a blacking out"(p. 109). Thus, Chaucer's "White" and Freud's "dark"/"black" may change places in the gender game without changing anything substantially. Such a game "commemorates the...[white or black woman's] erasure"(p. 109).

The significance of Ellmann's notion of woman as "third person" to my purpose becomes clearer later on in this chapter. For the moment, we note her contention that

> [d]ialogue is always haunted by a third person. 1+1=3: such is the logic...to dismantle opposition. ....
> Neither absent nor present, neither dead nor alive, woman 'is' the laughter of such oppositions at themselves, at their own labour to reduce 3 into 2, and 2 into 1. The law of gender is the law of the third person, the law of one too many. (pp. 108, 109)

"The law of...the third person," according to Ellmann, denies woman a place of her own. "Woman is the evasion of 'is'"(p. 109): she is dis-placed, re-placed, and, eventually, blacked out. While Maud Ellmann's specific focus is on [Chaucer's] "White" woman, it is nonetheless intimated that the implications of her discourse hold good for generic woman. But how, we ask, does the woman in African literature fit into all this?

"The Vanishing Point"

> Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.
> --Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens

The study of women in African literature received a big boost in 1986 with the publication of *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (eds. Carole Davies and Anne Graves). A year later, in 1987, the long overdue 15th volume of the African Literature Today series, *Women in African Literature Today* (ed. Eldred Jones), was published. The emphasis on "Women in African Literature" in Jones's volume and in the anthology of Davies and Graves is appropriate because the term "feminism" is a problematic one in African literature. A closer look at representative essays in *Women in African Literature Today* reveals the ambiguous responses of critics and creative writers alike to "[Western] feminism."

The collection of essays in Eldred Jones's volume attempts to indicate the range and variety of interpretations of women in African literature.[9] In her essay, "The Female Writer and Her Commitment," Molara Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that "the notion of 'femininity' (to be distinguished from 'femaleness'...) is a fiction invented by men"(p. 9). More to the point, after discussing select African female writers from a "feminist" perspective, the critic concedes with obvious irritation that

> many...African female writers like to declare that they are not feminists.... These denials come from unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, even Mariama Bâ.... Yet, nothing could be more feminist than the writings of these women writers, in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women in society. (p. 11)

Ogundipe-Leslie's irritation is shared by Katherine Frank.

5

The latter, in fact, quotes the former in her essay "Women Without Men":

> Most surprising is the fact that Emecheta and Nwapa ...deny that they are feminists at all, flying in the face of the patently clear orientation of their fiction. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie ascribes such denials 'to the successful intimidation of African women by men.' (pp. 32-33)

In the end, Katherine Frank herself "ascribes" to the view that "it is to the fiction that we must continue to turn. Imagined worlds are more potent than real ones"(p. 33).

Frank seems to be aware of the contradictions in her "radical feminist-separatist"(p. 22) reading of Flora Nwapa's One is Enough and Buchi Emecheta's Destination Biafra. Emecheta's heroine, Debbie, for example, who, according to Frank, is "an unabashed feminist"(p. 26), "[c]ertainly...the most liberated and militant," and "perhaps the apotheosis of the African New Woman"(p. 25) is also "so completely Europeanized that one may ask whether she is...still an African woman"(p. 26). Katherine Frank's problem is not new. It came up for review at the Sixth Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) held at the University of Guelph, Canada, in August 1983. Segun Oyekunle reports that the session on "feminism in Buchi Emecheta and the works of other African writers"

> drew particular attention because of one major flaw, the attempt to analyse feminist movements in Africa in the light of Western standards. As a result such crucial factors as African history and culture, the old and the new economic order, corporate and governmental perspectives and policies, the state of women and the nature of their expression in Africa

today, were ignored.[10]

Barely three years later, in April 1986, Buchi Emecheta attended the Second African Writers' Conference in Stockholm. The second- of the four-day conference was devoted to women's literature And Kirsten Petersen notes that on that day the "word feminism was not mentioned for a long time even though its ghost evidently stalked the room." When the word did finally come out "the women, with the possible exception of Ama Ata Aidoo, quickly dissociated themselves from it."[11]

It is hardly surprising that the Egyptian "feminist" writer, Nawal el Sa'adawi, for example, does not share Katherine Frank's separatist philosophy. In an interview with Rosemary Clunie, the Egyptian writer left the interviewer with the impression that "[s]he does not believe in taking the easy path as a feminist of rejecting men, nor as a socialist of rejecting religion.... It is the easiest thing in the world to reject men and say they are the enemy." The writer speaks for herself:

> 'It is more difficult to live with men [and] transform them into human[e] beings. It is more difficult to live with a religion and transform it into a humanist philosophy.'[12]

For el Sa'adawi, it is ultimately a matter of experiences deeply felt by a woman as a person and writer.

"Imagined worlds," according to Katherine Frank, "are more potent than real ones." But what if one's place in the "real" world is stranger than fiction? Bessie Head's life provides a case in point. The signifiers "black" and "white," the blanching out of woman as Chaucerian Blanche-figure, and the blacking out of woman as Freudian "dark continent"--issues, we recall, that pervade Maud Ellmann's essay "Blanche" --are the very ingredients of Head's life as documented by Charles Sarvan in his ALT 15 essay "Bessie Head":

> Bessie...was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa in 1937. Her Scottish mother...fell in love with the African groom and shortly after was committed by the family to an institution. Bessie Head was born in the asylum's hospital and was first given to an Afrikaner family to foster, but they soon rejected her because she was not sufficiently white. She was then handed over to a Coloured family, but, after a while, her Coloured foster mother was considered unsuitable...and Bessie Head was moved to a mission orphanage....
>
> Bessie...left South Africa on an exit permit. (An exit permit allows a citizen to leave South Africa but not to return.) From then until her death...she lived and worked in Serowe, Botswana, a stateless person. (pp. 82-83)

If you had lived a life like Bessie Head's you might, like Elizabeth, the protagonist in the autobiographical A Question of Power, come to the conclusion that "[s]he who suffered exclusion will not, in her turn, exclude anyone" (Sarvan, p. 88). The humanism of Bessie Head and el Sa'adawi comes through in spite of formidable odds.

"Awesome odds" and a woman's "affirmative attitude toward life" characterize Mbye Cham's "Study of the Novels of Mariama Bâ":

> Abandonment in the novels of Mariama Bâ is predominantly a female condition. It is both physical and psychological, and it transcends race, class, ethnicity and caste. Hence the universality of this cry of the woman subjected to this condition.

> . . . .
> In spite of awesome odds, [Mariama Bâ's] heroines are champions of change and justice and they inspire other women and people to live and carry on. (ALT 15: 89, 100)

Sensitivity, vision and courage inform the foci of Mariama Bâ, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Ama Aidoo and Nawal el Sa'adawi on woman. It is this type of courage infused with humanism that Chinua Achebe's very masculine, wife-beating protagonist, Okonkwo, is sent to his "motherland" to acquire to make him wholly human. In "Women and Resistance in Ngugi's Devil on the Cross," Jennifer Evans identifies the sort of courage I am referring to with Jacinta Wariinga, the woman through whom "Ngugi sees the essence of his own struggle and the communal struggle of the people of Kenya"(ALT 15: 138).

The rejection of the feminist label defined "in American terms"[13] by Nwapa, Emecheta, Head and el Sa'adawi, for example, amounts, in effect, to repudiating the self-effacing, identity-obliterating, Euro-American blanching in. That rejection does not, in any way, compromise these writers' commitment in both art and life to femaleness. Thus, Charlotte Bruner's observation that Bessie Head "says she is not a joiner, but she publishes in Ms"[14] provides, for me at least, no contradiction. The internationalist cause of women is furthered not hampered by Ms. Head's contribution to Ms.

Mariama Bâ died in August 1981. Bessie Head passed away in April 1986. These two distinguished representatives of

Simone de Beauvoir's "second sex" and Maud Ellmann's category of "third person[s]" bore their "double yoke" with dignity in the so-called Third World. They spoke and wrote against oppression in all its forms with the passion they alone could muster from the depths of their living experiences. The artist in them almost always succeeded in controlling and harnessing those experiences, the better to awaken readers to the hitherto "untold truth" with power and empathetic conviction. In "'A Wreath Upon the Grave,'" Barbara Rigney reminds us of Virginia Woolf's observation that "'Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney.'" The critic, in turn, suggests that feminists "gratefully bestow on Virginia Woolf a similar honour."[15] Bessie Head and Mariama Bâ deserve a womanist gesture of this kind from their compatriots. Those two writers sought to link female aspirations to both humanism and the immediate African environment. And that linkage defines a legacy worth preserving. African writers, in general, and womanists like Emecheta, Ama Aidoo and el Sa'adawi, in particular, should deck Bessie's head with garlands and lay a wreath upon Mariama's grave.[16]

"Strange Meeting"

> I hope...that you will come to view this exchange as an act of, shall we say, "antagonistic co-operation"?
>
> --Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug"

The diversity, even contradictoriness, of the distinctive voices that comprise "womanism" or "feminism," on the one hand, and the equally diverse discourses that are lumped together under the rubric "African literature," on the other, are too obvious to warrant reiteration. The particulars of race and gender make attempts to find common ground between Euro-American feminism and African literature problematic. Beyond that concession, however, one can identify a brand of "feminist perspective that is...humanistic...interdisciplinary, unlimited in scope...universal in application"[17] and therefore implicitly not at odds with either "African" or "womanist" perspectives on literature studies.

Comparisons could be, and indeed have been, drawn between woman as "third person" and persons of the "Third World."[18] Freud's "dark continent" recalls the colonizer's "dark," warm "continent" invitingly open to the white man's jouissance. The inference that "dark continent" is a kind of Freudian bitch in heat--in much the same way in which woman is said [by sexists] to be "bitch"--paves the way for a discussion of the dog image and its application to both woman and black person.

In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf, quoting from Cecil Gray's Survey of Contemporary Music, notes that

> [t]he woman composer stands where the actress stood in the time of Shakespeare. Nick Greene,...remembering the story I had made about Shakespeare's sister, said that a woman acting put him in mind of a dog dancing. Johnson repeated the phrase two hundred years later of women preaching. And here,...opening a book about music, we have the very words used again in...1928, of women who try to write music. 'Of Mlle.

> Germaine Tailleferre one can only repeat Dr. Johnson's dictum concerning a woman preacher, transposed into terms of music. "Sir, a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on his hind legs."'[19] [emphasis added]

And in Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad's Marlow

> 'had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen;... to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches..., walking on his hind legs.'[20] [emphasis added]

Those "very words"--"a dog...walking on his hind legs"--link sexist and racist attitudes to woman and black person respectively. A dog, "the carnivorous quadruped" of "many breeds wild and domesticated," turns out to be an appealing image for the woman who "breeds" and the black person who is conveniently consigned to a "'wild' breed." Apparently, both the woman and the black person have to be safely "domesticated" --taught, that is, to get used to existence on all fours. It is when these "domesticated 'breeds'" embark upon the unnatural act of standing up on their own and for themselves that they invite comparison with "a dog...walking on his hind legs"!

Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own provides additional material on the "strange meeting" of Woman and Black person. One of the [sub-]themes running through Woolf's book is the "convention...that publicity in women is detestable." As a result, "[a]nonymity runs in [women's] blood. The desire to be veiled still possesses them"(p. 49). Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man provides a paradigm for the blacking out of Black.

And Ayi Kwei Armah's protagonist in The Beautyful Ones is "invisible," anonymous and marginalized: he is "the invisible man of the shadows."[21] One could say that "anonymity runs in [the] blood" of Ellison's and Armah's "invisible m[e]n." Ngugi wa Thiong'o provides an instructive perspective on the foregoing. When he was arrested and confined to a prison cell, Ngugi answered to "a mere number." The writer records with irony his gratitude for "a room of [his] own":

> I was in cell 16 at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison as a political detainee answering to a mere number K6,77. Cell 16 would become for me what Virginia Woolf had called A Room of One's Own.[22]

For the writer-turned-anonymous-detainee, "a room of one's own" was "absolutely necessary."[23] What is true of the Black male is doubly true of the Black female: his marginality usually translates into her double marginality.

In her ironic, tongue-in-cheek manner, Virginia Woolf suggests that "women's books...be shorter...than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work. For interruptions there will always be"(p. 74). In Mother is Gold, Adrian Roscoe provides an "African" twist to such a suggestion:

> Africa has been brought up on much shorter narratives....
>
> It...means that, for the moment, the African reader is a short distance performer. And curiously enough, so, too, are many of the writers. Notice the brevity of many of their texts, whether they are traditionalists like Tutuola or moderns like Soyinka and Clark.[24]

To Roscoe, traditional, generic, and genetic coding stand in the way of the African in her attempt to read or write "masculine," multiple-decker, duly serialized Victorian delights like Dombey and Son. And that, to the modern day connoisseur of megatexts, is bad news!

Post-Woolf feminist criticism and post-colonial criticism of African literature have benefited from the "purgative effects of...rage vented upon...tradition and institutions."[25] Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women (1968), Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970), and Mary Daly's "philosophy of women's liberation" as expressed in Beyond God the Father (1973), for example, are as explicitly polemical and overtly critical of male authors and "phallic criticism" as the essays by Chinweizu, Ihechukwu Madubuike, and Onwuchekwa Jemie which culminated in their Toward the Decolonization of African Literature (1980) are unashamedly polemical and avowedly critical of colonial authors and "Eurocentric criticism." The relative calm after the purgative storm has been characterized, in the main, by the desire to "[create] new traditions rather than merely blaming the old."[26] The elusive quest for an African, womanist, or feminist aesthetic is motivated by the comparable need to secure a room of one's own in the palace of art.

Womanists, feminists, and African writers have always been concerned about the function of language. Adrienne Rich's discomfort with "the language that has lied about us" is the feminist's variation on Ngugi's irritation over "colonial" languages. The African who uses English, French, or Portuguese as her medium of expression writes with what Andrea Dworkin describes as "a broken tool." Dworkin's own attempt at "re-inventing" language reminds one of Achebe's interest in "fashioning out an English...able to carry his peculiar experience."[27] For Rich, Ngugi, Dworkin and Achebe, the reassessment of the very life-blood of literature, language, is "that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed."[28] And this "rearrangement" is a function of the revisionist thrust of Womanist, Feminist, and African literatures. There is a marked tendency in each body of literature toward willful misreading. She who has been consistently displaced and mis-placed now reads and writes "in a way which revises, displaces and recasts the precursor [canon]...so that [she] can clear a space for [her] own imaginative originality."[29]

It would appear to be the case, then, that while the particulars of race and/or gender inhibit hasty generalizations, there are, upon closer examination, some significant points of convergence--particularly in the areas of the function of language and the contextual approach to criticism--between womanism or feminism, on the one hand, and African literature studies, on the other. But a more specific than general question remains to be asked: how does the African female writer define herself in relation to the male-dominated "tradition" of African literature, at one extreme, and Euro-American-inspired feminism, at the other? Ama Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy whose protagonist embarks on a journey from Africa to Europe and back to Africa provides, among other things, "reflections" on the question posed. It is to this text that we now turn.

The Body of this Chapter: What is the matter with Ama Ata?

> The ubiquitous reading of the female body in terms of hunger, fever, and availability is a staple of literary and historical narratives, in the Caribbean and elsewhere.
> --Lemuel Johnson, "Sisters of Anarcha"

> One of the functions of all my novels is to prove that the novel in general does not exist.
> --Vladimir Nabokov, Strong Opinions

Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy is difficult to characterize. The text seems to defy easy categorization, and one soon gets the impression that it defines itself by this very fact. Our Sister Killjoy shares with Kofi Awoonor's This Earth, My Brother... unusual typography and odd structure. Both authors alternate poetic impressionism with expository prose; but while the typography of Aidoo's text is deliberately choppy, Awoonor tries to standardize his typography somewhat by confining his poeticizing to the prologue and chapter-fragments "1a" to "12a" and ensuring that the fifteen main chapters read like "normal" prose. Gareth Griffiths observes, in this connection, that

> [Wole] Soyinka's later plays and novels and Awoonor's novel This Earth, My Brother...may be seen to exist

> by virtue of undoing themselves as forms, forcing the socio-cultural constraints of the patronage system which sustain them to betray their limitations.[30]

That observation holds good for Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy.

Griffiths's statement that some identifiable African texts "may be seen to exist by virtue of undoing themselves as forms" echoes Vladimir Nabokov's reminder that "one of the functions of...[his] novels is to prove that the novel in general does not exist."[31] Nabokov's own Pale Fire, for example, combines poetry with prose commentary and "exist[s] by virtue of undoing [itself] as [a form]." And so too do, for instance, James Joyce's collagist Ulysses and Ishmael Reed's pastiche, Mumbo Jumbo. Walter Allen's bewilderment at Joyce's unconventionality provides an interesting perspective on our discussion:

> For my own part, to limit the discussion to Ulysses, after repeated readings I am still unable to see the novel as a whole. Whether it is a whole or a magnificent ruin I do not yet know.[32]

The more critics came/come to terms with the [post]modernist sensibility, the less odd "magnificent ruin[s]" like Ulysses became/become. A combination of something akin to the [post]-modernist sensibility and an anomic state of affairs accounts for Ofeyi's

> 'I always thought..., what a pity if the bridge was ever completed. It was perfect as it was, dangling ...nowhere. Those painters and musicians who left some works unfinished, I suspect they did it deliberately.'[33]

Against this background we can better appreciate Ama Aidoo's assumption that the Anglo-Irish Joyce, the Euro-American Nabokov, the Black American Reed, and the Africans Awoonor and Soyinka had already made "the structure of oddity" that defines *Our Sister Killjoy* less "odd."

I begin my discussion of Aidoo's text at the beginning. The text's full title, *Our Sister Killjoy Or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint*, tells *a* story that anticipates *the* story. The take-your-pick stance intimated by "Or,"[34] the destruction of complacency signalled by "Killjoy," and the ambiguity which "Black-Eyed Squint" signifies, all point to textual strategies central to the text's concerns. The protagonist is "black-eyed" because she is "black"/"brown"--the epithet transference turns a brown-eyed black girl/woman into a black-eyed brown girl/woman--and metaphorically "beaten" ("she has suffered, the African [woman]. Allah, how she has suffered").[35] Her squint is both paradoxical and ambiguous: she is neither necessarily "cross-eyed" nor "spiteful"; but having been closeted for so long, she has, out of necessity, developed the ability to "see with half an eye"--to see things or understand situations with ease because they are so obvious. "Reflections" from this "Black-Eyed Squint" are meant to be as curious as they are paradoxical, and as unnerving as they are ambiguous.

Aidoo's text is anything but univocal. A close examination of the text's four-part structure, for example, reveals the range of critical languages that are echoed in, and may be brought to bear on, the text. Our Sister Killjoy traces Sissie's trip from her native Africa to Europe and back to Africa. This trip bears the marks of an archetypal journey: neither Sissie who embarks on the journey, the Europe she visits and leaves behind, nor the Africa she departs from and returns to remains the same. And, already, there is enough in the figure of the journey to whet the archetypal critic's appetite. The first leg of Sissie's journey corresponds to the first section of the text entitled "Into a Bad Dream." The conjunction of the journey and dream motifs resounds with psychoanalytic implications and invites a Freudian interpretation in particular. Is this an internalized "journey" from innocence to experience? Is Sissie involved in a quest for self or identity? Why "bad" dream? Is there a feeling of guilt--caused by what?--in all this? Terry Eagleton reminds us that "[e]very human being has to undergo [the] repression of what Freud named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle,' but...the repression may become excessive and make us ill."[36] Does this explain the "bad dream" that marks the transition from Africa to Europe? These are questions that engage the particular attention of psychoanalytic critics, and Ama Aidoo gives them food for thought.

The title of the second section of Our Sister Killjoy is the sensuously suggestive and eminently symbolic "The Plums." Helen Chasin's poem "The Word Plum" offers some insight into the choice of "plums" as section-title:

The word plum is delicious

pout and push, luxury of
self-love, and savoring murmur

full in the mouth and falling
like fruit

taut skin
pierced, bitten, provoked into
juice, and tart flesh

question
and reply, lip and tongue
of pleasure.

The editors of the Norton Introduction to Literature provide accompanying commentary that rivals the poem in its suggestiveness:

> The poem savors the sounds of the word as well as the taste and feel of the fruit.... The tight, clipped sounds of "taut skin / pierced" suggest the sharp breaking of the skin and solid flesh, and as the tartness is described, the words ("provoked," "question") force the mouth to pucker as it would if it were savoring a tart fruit."[37]

Aidoo's protagonist, Sissie, turns out to be the "plum" of Marija's eye[s]. The German housewife feeds her African female acquaintance with the juicy fruit, plum, and, on occasion, with other "plump" delicacies:

> So she sat, Our Sister, her tongue caressing the plump berries with skin-colour almost like her own, while Marija told her how she had selected them specifically for her, off the single tree in the garden. (p. 40)

Marija's intentions would be as clear to speakers of Aidoo's native language as they would be to those familiar with either Chasin's poem or the biblical "tree ['of the knowledge of good and evil'] in the garden [of Eden]." The Akan word di means both "eat" and "make love to."

In his essay, "Sisters of Anarcha," Lemuel Johnson writes about "[t]he ubiquitous reading of the female body in terms of hunger...and availability."[38] Ama Aidoo's protagonist, Sissie, is available. And Marija is hungry. The activating circumstances are in place; but there will be neither rising action nor climax because Marija and Sissie are both female. Lesbianism may be a possibility in the future; but for now Sissie is wholly unprepared for it. She beats a hasty retreat emotionally, quite content, it seems, to eat "literal" plums and leave the symbolism and lesbianism to her "sisters" overseas. If, as Katherine Frank puts it in her ALT 15 essay, "Women Without Men," the "logical outcome" of "feminist separatism...[is] lesbianism"(p. 15), then Ama Aidoo's "sister" makes it clear that she is not ready to second that [e]motion yet. Whatever meanings others may read into this section of Our Sister Killjoy, it--the section--seems to have been dressed down to provide symbolist and imagist critics, in particular, some measure of textual bliss.

Aidoo's protagonist comes into her own in the third section of the text. The reader, like Sissie's "brothers" in London, is made to listen to her. The section is appropriately entitled "From Our Sister Killjoy." Feminist or womanist scholars put woman at center stage, and this is what Aidoo, in retrospect, does in this section. Indeed, woman as "she" (p. 134) has the last word in Our Sister Killjoy. The fourth section, "A Love Letter," marks the structural and stylistic affirmation of the female coming into her own. The first-person format of Sissie's letter puts woman--Simone de Beauvoir's "second sex" and Maud Ellmann's "third person"--first. (Earlier first-person slave narratives like those of Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass share with recent reworkings of the epistolary mode by womanists like Alice Walker [in The Color Purple] and Mariama Bâ [in So Long a Letter] the insistence of the enslaved that they be heard as each tells, relates or writes his/her histoire himself/herself. "The speaking black subject [as distinct from 'black-as-object']," writes Henry Gates, Jr., "emerge[s] on the printed page to declare himself or herself to be a human being of capacities equal to [anybody's]. Writing, for [such] black authors, [is] a mode of being, of self-creation with words.")[39]

It is clear, then, that Our Sister Killjoy does not just anticipate its criticism in a general sort of way; it actually intimates the specific critical languages--like the archetypal, psychoanalytic, symbolist/imagist, and womanist/feminist--that may be brought to bear on its interpretation. These critical language systems are different yet related. Thus, the very process that emphasizes multiplicity also foregrounds simultaneity. One result of all this is to make it rather exasperating to read Our Sister Killjoy for the "usual 'African' story." The text, in fact, warns the reader that it is not for "those for whom things were only what they seemed"(OS, p. 79).

In "Ama Ata Aidoo and the Oral Tradition," Arlene Elder observes that Our Sister Killjoy's "unusual typography...suggests" Aidoo's interest in "something other than the conventional novel." In spite of this awareness, the critic's impatience with the text's unconventionality is apparent:

> The narrative proper does not begin until page 8. Preceding the story are several pages of curiously spaced, conversational observations.... Page 6 is only three-quarters filled with prose; pages 5 and 7 are shaped like poems; and pages 3 and 4 consist of only one line apiece. (ALT 15: 110)

There is really no "narrative proper" as such: the text defines itself as "improper." Where does the critic think "the narrative proper" begin in novels as far apart as A Sentimental Journey, Pale Fire or Mumbo Jumbo, for example? Given the nature of the text under discussion, it is hardly surprising to note that the blank spaces on those pages Elder refers to speak volumes. Aidoo mixes verse[-forms] with prose in her text partly because she has some very prosaic things to say about silences; but it so happens that it is verse, not prose, that is appropriately "full of sounds and silences."[40] If a "woman's place is to be out of place, perpetually displaced by a discourse that depends on her effacement," then the blank space signifies "the vagrant gap where woman does not appear, does not take place."[41] The blank space is Maud Ellmann's "Blanche." And she is dead; entombed in silence.

Tillie Olsen gives voice to this silence in *Silences* (1978). So too does Sissie in *Our Sister Killjoy*. Recalling "a speech" she made to her "brothers" in London, Sissie informs the reader that "when [she] paused, *the silence made itself heard*"(p. 130; emphasis added). In her speech, Sissie had referred to the "silence" of a mother that presaged "'a blessing of the womb that bore you'"(p. 130). And there is "of course, the language of love [that] *does not have to be audible*. It is beyond Akan or Ewe, English or French"(p. 113; emphasis added). Blank space, silence and inaudibility speak volumes in Aidoo's text.

Lemuel Johnson brings a Caribbean perspective to bear on our discussion. "Caribbean Female Ancients," writes Johnson, "represent not continuity as such..., but rupture; they mark the gaps, discontinuities, indeed, the ambiguity of bridges in the Caribbean experience of the past."[42] The desire to find for Aidoo's blank spaces "equivalent[s]" that "serve as a bridge in the narrative"(Elder, pp. 112-13) is motivated by the critic's own need for a comforting, main-streaming "bridge" where its absence is the point being made by Ama Aidoo in *Our Sister Killjoy*. "Rupture" and "discontinuities" are a function of Aidoo's language. And "the ambiguity of [formal] bridges" is reflected in her play with truncated versions of fictional methods--like the epistolary mode which is dogged by "gaps" between letters, the potentially episodic picaresque narrative, and the stream of consciousness method which is marked by random association.

The language of Our Sister Killjoy consists of the broad categories of prose and [pseudo-]poetry. Poeticizing is an important part of Aidoo's style. It is used effectively, for instance, to suggest that woman is the eternal unknown, a question mark:

> Why wish a curse on your child
> Desiring her to be female
> ? (p. 51)

What is covered by the term "prose" in Our Sister Killjoy is so multifarious that one really has to address oneself to a mixed register. Germanio-English ("'Ah ja, ja, ja that is ze country zey have ze President Nukurumah, ja?'"[p. 24]) is forced into an uneasy alliance with East Putney cockneyism ("'Deeah, Jayn's been awai all dai'"[p. 42]) and Africanized English ("Oga, 'this big Africa man go sit down te-e-ey, look at this Onyibo man wey e talk, wey e mout-go ya, ya, ya'"[p. 94]). Extrapolations from Dr. Christiaan Barnard's first heart transplant are couched in neologistic prose with a touch of biting irony:

> Cleaning the Baas's chest of its rotten heart and plugging in a brand-new, palpitatingly warm kaffir-heart, is the surest way to usher in the kaffirmillennium. (p. 101)

And journalese is the medium of choice for polemical commentary:

> What is frustrating...in arguing with a nigger who is a 'moderate' is that since the interests he is so busy defending are not even his own, he can regurgitate only what he has learnt from his bosses. (p. 6)

The narrator's frustration with the black person who defends "interests" that are "not...his own" mirrors the author's frustration with a language not her own, but which she is compelled to use (a language whose "interests [she] is so busy defending" in spite of herself?):

> First of all, there is this language.... I cannot give voice to my soul and still have her heard... [s]ince so far, I have only been able to use a language that enslaved me, and therefore, the messengers of my mind always come shackled. (p. 112)

Aidoo's text in its entirety suggests that language is as much an indicator of the mood of a fictional character or an individual in the real world ("the worse Marija felt, the more Germanic was her English"[p. 77]) as it is an indicator of the stance of an author on both art and life ("we have to have our own secret language. We must create this language. ... So that we [can] make love with words"[p. 116]). For now, however, this "common heritage," language, carries the burden of "rupture" and "discontinuities"; it is politicized and historicized:

> A common heritage. A
> Dubious bargain that left us
> Plundered of
> Our gold
> Our tongue
> Our life--while our
> Dead fingers clutch
> English--a
> Doubtful weapon fashioned
> Elsewhere to give might to a
> Soul that is already
> Fled. (pp. 28-29)

In Aidoo's fictional world, the histoire of language is the ultimate tragedy. The dialectical thrust of Our Sister Killjoy's language is a means to this ultimate end.

Multiple registers reflect the variety of fictional modes that Aidoo incorporates into her text. Reference has already been made in a different but related context to the epistolary form which characterizes Our Sister Killjoy's fourth section. We note further that that form takes us--because it dates--back to the beginnings of the novel in English. "Another important predecessor of the novel," writes M. Abrams, "was the picaresque narrative."[43] Sissie's "adventures" in Africa and Europe, we recall, make up and impinge upon the structure of Aidoo's text. The protagonist's trip abroad is meant to be educational: her experiences in Germany and England in particular force her to face up to and accept, first, her identity and, second, her role in the scheme of things. The episodic rendition of Sissie's "adventures," and the formative or educational import of her experiences, hint at the essential characteristics of the picaresque narrative and the Bildungsroman respectively. Moreover, depending on the "approach" or "perspective" we bring to bear on the narrative, the word "reflections" in the text's title may or may not be that important. What is true, however, is that the text's episodes and Sissie's "adventures" are saved from the limitations of the picaresque mode through the protagonist's "reflections" which transfer the experiences in Africa and Europe to the steady flow of the [inner] seascape of her--

Our Sister's--mental life. Those "reflections" usually find expression in interior monologue or the stream of consciousness method and account, in part, for the text's poetic impressionism. Ama Aidoo provides a mixture of fictional forms which is intended to be read as an admixture of the "old" (epistolary and picaresque modes) and "modern" (the stream of consciousness technique). The old-new, traditional-modern themes come up with predictable regularity in African literature; but Aidoo's perspective on these themes is as different as it is refreshing.

Ama Aidoo suggests that what is "modern" or "new" does not necessarily repudiate the "traditional." "The Elders," for example, "declared a long time ago that the unsavoury innards of the possum may be a delicacy for somebody else somewhere"(OS, p. 120). What was "declared a long time ago," it is implied, needs reiteration in a modern world fragmented into East and West, North and South, female and male. The reiteration of what is "traditional" in the "modern" world is important to Aidoo's concerns. This explains why for all its "modernism" Our Sister Killjoy is firmly rooted in tradition: African oral tradition. Ama Aidoo, like Toni Morrison in a related context, is "an inheritor as well as an innovator."[44]

The coexistence of prose and verse-forms in the world of fiction is both "old" and "new," "traditional" and "modern." We return to Arlene Elder's "Ama Ata Aidoo and the Oral Tradition" to focus attention on her observation that "there are passages" in Aidoo's text "written in poetic form, like the songs interspersed throughout the oral performance of a folk tale." Elder quotes Okechukwu Mezu to buttress her point:

> 'When children gather to listen to stories, yarns and fairy-tales from their grandparents, they listen to pieces interspersed with rhymes, lyrics and choruses.... One of the interesting aspects of traditional African civilization is the unity of the art forms.' (ALT 15: 111)

The sentences following the last one above, which are not quoted by Elder, are directly relevant to my purpose:

> It seems that there is fully realized the great correspondance dream of Charles Baudelaire--the unity and association of music, poetry, dance and painting in the process of which the sounds of music, the rhythms, phrases and syllables, the allegories and analogies of poetry, the steps, movements, jumps and signals of dance and finally the colours of painting are unified in a symbolic world where religion provides a solid and firm structure. Side by side with this unity of the art forms is the element of repetition which incidentally is found also in black American music especially in jazz and blues.... The same repetition is...found in cha-cha, the samba, the pachanga, rhumba, maringa and the popular West African high-life. This repetitive approach to most African art forms, a litany that says the same things in various ways, describ[es] the attributes of the object of praise in an unfathomable way.[45]

Dealing with "the same things in various ways" is an apt description of the pluri-generic cluster of Soyinka texts on which the previous chapter focused attention: Madmen and Specialists, A Shuttle in the Crypt, The Man Died and Season of Anomy. And "the unity and association of music...,painting [and sculpture]" are demonstrated in The Interpreters. Soyinka may bask in classical and contemporary world literature; but he has always been rooted in a local tradition which, among other things, underscores "the unity of the art forms." Those traditional "Roots...[have] be[en] the network of [his] large / Design."[46] "A thoroughly viable...b[l]ack cloth"[47] links Soyinka to Mezu and Ama Aidoo. One notes, in this connection, Kofi Awoonor's statement that his novel This Earth, My Brother... marks "an attempt at a new form which [he] see[s] in folkloristic ritual, [and in] poetic terms."[48] Awoonor's "new form," like Aidoo's, is rooted in the "old," the "traditional," the "folkloristic."

If Ama Ata Aidoo, the writer conscious of modernist/postmodernist trends, finds the unity of seemingly disparate art forms (celebrated in Joyce's Ulysses and apparent in Soyinka, for example) and the coupling of poetry and prose commentary (as in Nabokov's Pale Fire) fascinating, then it is, at least in part, because she has been literally brought up on African prototypes of such coupling and/or "unity of...art forms." The Ghanaian writer sees the future of African literature in a judicious return to an African tradition that has always underscored the fundamental "unity" of the vast continuum of verbal discourses. Given certain post-Joyce[an] developments in Euro-American theorizing, the return to "tradition" translates into anticipation of the future and reaffirmation of the [post]modern.

There are, of course, theoretical and philosophical differences between mainstream Euro-American literature and African (written and oral) literatures. Chinua Achebe drew attention to one such difference at the Fourth International Book Fair held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in August 1987. A West Africa correspondent reports on

> Achebe's...call to African writers to challenge the ...view, prominent in some quarters, that 'art and politics mix no more easily than water with oil,' a view, he continued, which 'does not find any support in the vast corpus of African traditional stories.'[49]

Aidoo shares Achebe's views. And, significantly, womanists and feminists alike have, for good reason, not shied away from politics:

> [Virginia] Woolf's most fundamental contribution to modern feminist theory...is her insistence that literary critical analysis must take social and political factors into consideration, must recognize that women's peculiar relationship to that social order in which they remain outsiders determines their experience as well as their perceptions. The very essence of modern feminist theory, and that factor which unifies modern feminist critics despite other disagreements as to the proper scope and function of their craft, is the insistence that art must be viewed contextually and therefore politically.[50]

Ama Aidoo "[views]" her art "contextually and therefore politically." In this, as in other instances, Aidoo is in tune with the "old" (Achebe's "vast corpus of African traditional stories") and the "new" ("modern [womanist-]feminist theory"). Indeed, we can gauge Our Sister Killjoy's contextual depth by examining the text's specific response to and relationship with African literature, womanism and feminism.

Aidoo's protagonist meets and "compare[s] notes"(p. 80) with her black "brothers" in a composite gesture that corresponds to the author's intertextual dialogue with her male counterparts like Camara Laye (the author of The African Child) and William Conton (author of The African). Laye's "African child" goes through strenuous initiation ceremonies that prepare him for glorious manhood, while Conton's "African," also male, travels to England, returns home to assume the high office of prime minister; but leaves home again for the Union of South Africa to avenge a white South African woman's death. Through her protagonist, who is variously referred to as "das Schwartze Mädchen"(p. 12), "the African girl"(p. 43), "the black girl" and "the African"(p. 44), Ama Aidoo recalls Laye's and Conton's texts and, in the process, initiates a dialogue between "the African [male] child" and "the African [male]," on the one hand, and "...sister killjoy," on the other. It is implied that the story of the African is not the exclusive preserve of males. Nor is the story of the wretched and the oppressed dominated by the black male rather than by "men, women, [and] children"(p. 85). In fact, from Sissie's point of view, the African woman represents the wretchedness of Frantz Fanon's "wretched of the earth":

> For
> Here under the sun,
> Being a woman...
> Never will be a
> Child's game...
> So why wish a curse on your child
> Desiring her to be female
> ?
> Beside[s], my sister,
> The ranks of the wretched are
> Full. (p. 51)

It is important to appreciate this point of view because it sponsors the suggestive image of the black female as "A dog among the masters, the / Most masterly of the / Dogs"(p. 42). If woman reminds Virginia Woolf's Nick Greene of a dog and Joseph Conrad's Marlow associates a black person with a dog, then a person who is both black and female is, with a touch of Aidoo's irony, "the / Most masterly of the / Dogs," slave to the slave.

Aidoo's text brings history and race to bear on her commitment to femaleness. The unique position of the black female, doubly enslaved by race and gender, comes out in Sissie's attitude to her "sisters" abroad.[51] "The Welsh maid from East Putney"(p. 92), the Scottish "Lady-on-the-bus"(p. 91), the German Marija, the English Jane, the Swedish Ingrid, and the French Michelle (pp. 24-25), are all "sisters" by gender; but Sissie does not consider them "soul sisters." Each of them

> could have passed for a soul sister,
> But for her colour
> --and our history. (p. 93; emphasis added)

Race ("colour") and "history" are identified explicitly as the two main factors informing Sissie's attitude. But both Sissie and the narrator also identify and spell out a problem --"LONELINESS"--that pre- and postdates a "'soul' sister" like Aretha Franklin's call for R-E-S-P-E-C-T.[52] Critics like Sunday Anozie, who see a place for "mathematical axiomatics"[53] in criticism and critical theory, may subscribe to the observation that the "L" of "LONELINESS" creates an [interesting] angle [on things] through the meeting of two straight lines--those of androgynous "loneliness" and the "tear out of a woman's eye"--perpendicular to each other:

> L
> O
> N
> E
> L
> I
> N
> E
> S
> S
>
> Forever falling like a tear out of a woman's eye.
> (*OS*, p. 65)

Once respect for a woman is firmly in place, the burden of womanhood will be lessened considerably; but for the modern person--female or male--loneliness is a condition of being. A healthier relationship between human beings than has been possible so far may well be the implied and preferred antidote to loneliness. Ama Aidoo's "womanist" philosophy commits her, in Alice Walker's words, "to [the] survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female."[54] That philosophy is infused with enough humanism to make it possible for Aidoo to write from a Black woman's point of view and still keep her eyes on the connectedness of things. Her text provides "a place-- / Another junction to meet a / Brother and compare notes"(p. 80). It is suggested, however, that things are not connected in a vacuum; that, indeed, the contexts of gender, race, and history are inextricably linked to a person's--any person's--identity. The "brother" in Our Sister Killjoy may himself be his sister's oppressor; but, in the wider scheme of things, this oppressor is himself oppressed. He is, in effect, the ultimate "brother" in a relationship that is akin to the sisterhood of the wretched.

Far from shying away from references to sexism, racism, history and politics, Aidoo's text indicates how these ideas constitute a polemical matrix at once dramatic and inevitable in life as in the illusion of life. The polemics that characterizes a students' union meeting seems like "a well-planned drama"(p. 125) to Sissie. And the drama of "life" yields this observation:

> After inflicting pain,
> We try to be funny...,
> Unaware that for
> The sufferer,
> The Comedy is
> ...Tragedy. (pp. 77-78)

The author deliberately blurs the distinction between art and life. "Tragedy" feeds on the real or imagined "pain" of a "sufferer" in much the same way in which those who "try to be funny" provide raw material for "Comedy." It is apparent that Our Sister Killjoy insists on being read and interpreted contextually. Ama Aidoo ensures that the contextual imperative is situated in an updated mimetic theory that guarantees validity to seeing art "imitating" life.

"A Question of Power": the Inevitable Conclusion to the Body of this Chapter

> 'Writing is power: it gives you power, by being known, by communicating with people.'
> --Nawal el Sa'adawi, Interview with Rosemary Clunie

el Sa'adawi knows about the balance of power between the Arab female and her male counterpart. She experienced the brutality of naked power when she was detained in Anwar Sadat's Egypt in 1981. "Writing," to her, "is power" of a different kind. It is also therapy: "'I feel oppression, the injustices in life...so I become furious and want to fight back...by writing.'"[55] Writing serves similar functions for Aidoo's protagonist. To Sissie, writing fulfills the "great ...need to communicate"; it also functions as therapy since it takes "some of the pain away"(p. 133). For both Ama Aidoo and el Sa'adawi, writing as therapy amounts to putting one's own house in order as the basis for harnessing the "power" of writing to communicate with the Other.

Within the context of African literature, putting the African literary house in order after disruptive influences and communicating with the Other are commitments shared by a "sister" like Ama Aidoo and "brothers" like Kofi Awoonor, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah. Attention has been drawn to correspondences between Our Sister Killjoy and This Earth, My Brother... earlier on in this chapter. Those correspondences are, in any case, obvious enough. Less obvious, but by no means less important, are Our Sister Killjoy's affinities with Achebe's first two novels (Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease), Soyinka's two novels (The Interpreters and Season of Anomy) and Armah's first three novels (The Beautyful Ones, Fragments and Why Are We So Blest?). Before the publication of Our Sister Killjoy, Ama Aidoo had taken the title of her collection of short stories, No Sweetness Here (1970), from Armah's first novel: "[t]he listening mind is disturbed by memories from the past. So much time has gone by, and still there is no sweetness here."[56] Aidoo's gesture pays tribute to a compatriot and, in the process, reminds us that African writers do read, respond to, and echo each other. In Our Sister Killjoy, Aidoo implicitly acknowledges, and builds upon, the contribution of fellow-writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Armah and Awoonor to African fiction.

Rupture, disintegration and discontinuities characterize the fictional world evoked by Chinua Achebe in his first two novels as they do in the world of Soyinka's two novels. The latter novelist shares the former's sense of things falling apart and, as a consequence, individuals and communities feeling no longer at ease. In The Interpreters (1965), Wole Soyinka's fragmented world is rooted in the timeless past of Yoruba mythology and the present of post-colonial Nigeria. Kola's painting of a pantheon of Yoruba deities is based on the

> myth [which] informs us that a jealous slave [Atunda] rolled a stone down the back of the first and only deity [Orisa-nla] and shattered him in a thousand and one fragments. From this...act...was born the Yoruba

pantheon.[57]

The myth is given contemporary validity: Kola's models for the Yoruba deities are his fellow post-colonial "interpreters." In Soyinka's second novel, Season of Anomy (1973), physical and societal fragmentation are institutionalized. Armah, in his turn, seeks the ancestral and modern roots of post-colonial malaise in The Beautyful Ones (1968) and Why Are We So Blest? (1972). The second novel, Fragments (1970), returns to the image of "shattered...in a thousand and one fragments" which undergirds Soyinka's narrative in The Interpreters and informs Achebe's in Things Fall Apart (1958) and No Longer at Ease (1960). The interpreters who leave a lot to be desired in Things Fall Apart ("Ajofia...the leading egwugwu of Umuofia...addressed Mr. Smith.... 'The body of the white man, do you know me?' he asked. Mr. Smith looked at his interpreter, but Okeke [the interpreter]...was also at a loss")[58] are not doing much better in Soyinka's post-colonial novel, The Interpreters. The intertextual "plot" thickens. Obi, the graduate in English who feels no longer at ease in Achebe's second novel, prefigures Baako Onipa, the writer in Armah's Fragments who feels so ill at ease that he goes "mad." Fragmentation is, thus, internalized. Following Achebe, Soyinka and Armah, Ama Aidoo, for her part, translates fragmentation into a structural imperative. The structural and stylistic, rather than cultural or sociological, implications of the "[m]ere anarchy" that Things Fall Apart hints at are finally "loosed upon the [fictional] world" of Our Sister Killjoy (1977).

The choppy typography, the fluidity of modes, and the multiplicity of registers which characterize Our Sister Killjoy give a sense of structural and linguistic anarchy that is functional. The author's "sound and fury" signify a couple of things: the need for, and the very process of, revamping. Rereading, willful misreading, de- and re-coding[59] are tools used in African literature and womanist or feminist discourse to undermine "canonized 'literature'" that tends to black out Black and blanch out Woman. Womanists'/feminists' attempt to seek--in fact, to demand--recognition of the "power" of women's writing in canon-[re]formation is comparable to the efforts of African writers toward an identical goal. The matter with Ama Ata Aidoo is that as a writer, a woman committed to femaleness, and as an African proud of her heritage, she is, by definition, the revisionist's [ultra-]revisionist. To Ama Aidoo, as to her "Sister Killjoy,"

> No city is sacred,
> No spot is holy.
> Not Rome,
> Not Paris,
> Not London. (OS, p. 79)

The precursor canon (emblematized by "Rome"), literary institution (embodied in "Paris"), and tradition (symbolized by "London") are under siege. They have to be if Ama Aidoo, the African female writer "at a time like this," is to succeed in "clear[ing] a space for [her] own imaginative originality."[60] It is, in the final analysis, a question of power.

Chinua Achebe's fascination with questions relating to power is as apparent in his first, as it obviously is in his latest, novel. But it has not always been obvious to critics that as early as Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease, the novelist's rendition of the literality of power politics was never divorced from the politics of literary interpretation. The chapter on Achebe that follows and the concluding chapter after it mark the culmination of the intent to valorize literariness over literal-mindedness that has been tested in previous chapters.

CHAPTER V

ARCHITECTONIC ANTHILLS AND THE ACHEBE LEGACY, 1958-1987

> For the definition of modern genres one probably does best to start with a specific highly influential book and author, and look for the reverberations.
>
> --René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*

> I've always held Chinua Achebe's writing in the highest esteem, believing it to be the most singular contribution the continent of Africa has made to world literature.... [M]any of us...owe a great deal to him; many have even learnt the craft from him.
>
> --Nuruddin Farah, review of *Anthills of the Savannah*

Achebe Then and Now

Chinua Achebe sees himself as a "conscious artist," and the conscious artistry is observable in the four novels that precede *Anthills of the Savannah*. But conscious artistry does not necessarily translate into consummate art. One recalls instances of information-giving in *Things Fall Apart* which detract from the text's artistic integrity:

> Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad *chi* or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave. He died of the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess. When a man was afflicted with

> swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die.[1]

Generally, Achebe succeeds in handling his informative storytelling technique so well that the telling of the tale and the evocation of the world of the tale are dovetailed. If proverbs, for instance, constitute an important dimension of the telling of the tale, it is because proverbs are inseparable from the world of the tale. The excerpt above draws attention to the inevitable tedium when things do not work well enough. "Or rather" following closely after "or" in anticipation of the explanatory note, "[w]hen a man was afflicted with swelling...[h]e was carried to the...Forest," signals a slackening in authorial control over language and narrative pace. The reader, like the language itself, strains for fresh air. One notes, too, that in No Longer at Ease the narrator occasionally allows himself a declamatory tone which he, the narrative, and the reader can certainly do without:

> Let them [foreigners, particularly the English] come to Umuofia now and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation. Let them come and see men and women and children who knew how to live, whose joy of life had not yet been killed by those who claimed to teach other nations how to live.[2]

These sentiments are attributed to Obi; but the pseudo-negritudinist "us" against "them" polarization couched in language that strives unsuccessfully for effect ("men and women and children...whose joy of life had not yet been killed") is not "in character."[3] Neither Obi nor Achebe succeeds in attuning this overwrought patch to the rest of the narrative.

Chinua Achebe likes his third novel Arrow of God very much. It is a novel which, according to the author, he is "most likely to be caught sitting down to read again." Coincidentally, the first edition of the novel had "certain structural weaknesses" which the novelist took "the opportunity of a new edition to remove."[4] At least one apparent "weakness" survives both editions. As Chief Priest of Ulu, Ezeulu is part man part god. He is caught up in the whirlpool of events that leave "the heaviest load...on [his] mind"(p. 218); but the reader is not given enough insight into Ezeulu's mind. Thus, when we read that "the constant, futile throbbing of...thoughts...finally left a crack in Ezeulu's mind"(p. 229), we wish the author had taken us into his confidence--as Ngugi does with Mugo in A Grain of Wheat--and prepared us adequately for, rather than inform us about, the "crack in [the protagonist's] mind." Gareth Griffiths notes, in this connection, that

> with Achebe a character's inner reactions are usually displayed dramatically in and through his reactions to his society, and in a novel like Things Fall Apart we are only rarely allowed to 'go behind' Okonkwo and see directly how he is responding to events.[5]

Indeed, the first-person point of view in A Man of the People does not guarantee direct enough access into the workings of Odili's mind. Achebe's double-voiced discourse presents the narrator, Odili, both as victim (like Nanga) and instrument (unlike Nanga) of the author's ironic-satiric intent. The novel's focus is much more on those external forces that impinge upon Odili's life than on the internal resources he can marshal to control his life and immediate environment. And so while we are allowed glimpses of slightly longer duration at the regions of the post-Okonkwo protagonists' thought and mental strife/life, we--readers--have to wait till Anthills of the Savannah for the open invitation to "go behind" Christopher Oriko, Ikem Osodi and Beatrice Okoh to share their fears and doubts "and see directly how [they are] responding to events." More so in Anthills than in any of the earlier novels, both reader and novelist are expected to "listen to [the] characters": "'It simply dawned on [Ikem] ...that a novelist must listen to his characters who after all are created to wear the shoe and point the writer where it pinches.'"[6] In his latest novel, Achebe creates different narrative points of view for significant narrative strands. The story of Anthills is told by an omniscient narrator and the three major characters, Chris, Ikem and Beatrice. First-person narration and interior monologue allow each of these characters to tell his/her story and for the reader to get to know him/her from the "inside." And the author's plot ensures that each character's story, no matter how peculiar, complements the others': "'We are all connected. You cannot tell the story of any of us without implicating the others'" (p. 66). Furthermore, the first-person "I" in Anthills is the

Whitmanesque "I" which "contains multitudes":

> '"Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman. "Very well, I contradict myself," he sang defiantly. "I am large, I contain multitudes." Every artist contains multitudes. Graham Greene is a Roman Catholic, a partisan of Rome. . . . Why then does he write so compulsively about bad, doubtful and doubting priests? Because a genuine artist, no matter what he says he believes, must feel in his blood the ultimate enmity between art and orthodoxy.' (p. 100)

This passage is extracted from notes "handwritten [on] paper" (p. 101) by Ikem and read aloud to Beatrice. The very process of sharing his ideas with Beatrice and, by extension, with the reader is Whitmanesque: Ikem's "I" becomes "We"; what is his becomes ours.[7]

In the Achebe world, "I contain multitudes" is a variation on Ikem's observation that "'[s]ociety is an extension of the individual'"(p. 99). This observation is borne out in all of Achebe's novels to date. In Anthills, however, the author is noticeably interested in looking into the inner workings of society and the individual. This explains why the omniscient narrator chooses to take up residence in the mind of either Chris, Ikem or Beatrice to tell the story through the character's eyes and to present his/her thoughts and reactions to events. In such instances, the narrator knowingly limits his omniscience the better to "'listen to [the] characters'"(p. 97). This chapter gives credence to the observation that the author whose craftmanship is apparent in his first novel, in spite of the occasional hiccup, consummates his proven artistry in his latest novel. Nuruddin Farah, for example, writes enthusiastically about Achebe's success in "constructing the neatest of plots" in Anthills.[8] That skillfully constructed "neatest of plots" allows for versatility in the choice and use of appropriate points of view for different narrative strands.

Achebe Again and Again

The Achebe world is one of intertextual continuities. Okonkwo is the protagonist in Things Fall Apart whose son, Nwoye, reappears in No Longer at Ease as the father of the protagonist, Obi. The "been-to" who feels no longer at ease is the grandson of the home-based traditionalist who witnessed and participated in things fall[ing] apart. Things Fall Apart ends with the title of a book the District Commissioner in that novel intends to write, "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger." The book is written and published by the time we get to Arrow of God: "Tony Clark...was now reading the final chapter of The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger, by George Allen, which Captain Winterbottom had lent him"(AOG, p. 32). Achebe's fourth novel A Man of the People, we recall, is a post-colonial version of the estranged relationship between a man and his people--a relationship that defines Okonkwo's tragedy in the first novel, Things Fall Apart.

Anthills assumes that the reader is or ought to be familiar with the Achebe world. For example, Beatrice (BB) tells

Chris [and the reader] this: "'I do sometimes feel like Chielo in the novel, the priestess and prophetess of the Hills and the Caves'"(p. 114). "'The novel'" referred to is Achebe's first. In the eleventh chapter of Things Fall Apart, "Chielo, the priestess of Agbala," "the Oracle of the Hills and Caves," visits Okonkwo's household to take Ezinma away because, according to the priestess, "'Agbala wants to see her'"(TFA, pp. 70, 75, 71). And when "the bearded old man" in Anthills informs his audience that "'[i]f [Ikem Osodi] comes home and tells us that we should say yes we will do so because he is there [at Bassa, the seat of government] as our eye and ear'"(p. 126), he reminds the reader of Ezeulu's reason for sending Oduche to the Christian church:

> 'I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you [Oduche] will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share.' (AOG , pp. 45-46)

Times may have changed considerably; but traditional wisdom in Arrow of God holds good in Anthills of the Savannah.

The graduate-in-English-as-protagonist motif in No Longer at Ease is replicated in Anthills. "His Excellency" introduces Beatrice to his guests with a politician's exuberance:

> '[T]his is one of the most brilliant daughters of this country, Beatrice Okoh. She is a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance--the only person in the service, male or female, with...first-class honours in English...from Queen Mary College, University of London. Our Beatrice beat the English to their game. We're very proud of her.' (p. 75)

Chinua Achebe expects womanists to be "proud of her" too.

Beatrice's life in *Anthills* provides an ironic commentary on the other name that is given her at baptism, "Nwanyibuife--A female is also something"(p. 87).[9] This latter-day female graduate in English is as intelligent, dynamic, honest, self-supporting and conscious of, as well as secure in, her identity as her male predecessor, Obi, is dull, bland, corruptible, dependent and confused about his identity. If Obi reminds us that "the beautyful ones are not yet born," Beatrice inspires us with her conviction that "the beautyful ones...[may] yet [be] born." By the end of *Anthills*, something "*Beautiful*!"(p. 232), even if "'*unbearably* beautiful'" (p. 233), has been born. Elewa's child, whose naming ceremony concludes the novel, is a baby-girl "born into deprivation" (p. 217). The times explain, and its father's death underlines, the child's "deprivation." This is "unbearable." But the very fact that this child is alive suggests that the father, Ikem, did not die in vain; that, indeed, the father *lives* in the child. And this is "beautiful":

> 'We shall call this child AMAECHINA: *May-the-path-never-close*. Ama for short.'
> 'But that's a boy's name.'
> 'No matter.'
> 'Girl fit answer am also.'
> 'It's a beautiful name. The Path of Ikem.'
> 'That's right. May it never close, never overgrow.'
> 'Das right!'
> 'May it always shine! The Shining Path of Ikem.'
> ....
> 'In our traditional society,' resumed Beatrice, 'the father named the child. But the man who should have done it today...is not here although I know he is floating around us now, watching.' (p. 222)

The circumstances surrounding the birth and naming of this child are "unbearable" yet "beautiful." This baby-girl with "'a boy's name'" therefore symbolizes what is "unbearably beautiful" in Anthills. The blood and tears--of joy and of pain--which go with the birth of this child also characterize Achebe's fictional account of a state yet to recover from the "season of anomy."

The question, and obvious abuse, of power in a post-colonial environment are issues that pervade A Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah. Nuruddin Farah observes of the latter novel that

> [w]e're back to where the story of A Man of the People was interrupted, in 1966, by the army takeover of power in Nigeria. Only we are not in Nigeria, but in a fictitious country called Kangan Republic.[10]

The minor issue as to whether there is much, if anything, to choose between the fictional "Nigeria" of A Man of the People and the equally fictional "Kangan Republic" in Anthills need not detain us; but the suggestion that Anthills takes us "back to where the story of A Man of the People was interrupted" certainly needs qualification. The reader learns from Anthills that there had been "'nine years of civilian administration'"(p. 146) before Sam, the Sandhurst-trained Army Commander and current head of state, came to power through a coup. In fact, at the beginning of the novel we are already three years into Sam's rule. We learn through flashback that a year after the coup --which translates into two years before the novel's chronological beginning--the Army Commander had asked that he be elected president-for-life in a popular referendum. To the Commander's chagrin, Abazon, one of the four Kangan provinces, voted "No." What Achebe does in Anthills, then, is to refer to a symbolic twelve-year time span (nine years of civilian government followed by three years of military rule) and focus attention on "the uneasy calm of the past twelve months...at last...speeding to a close"(p. 163). Particular attention is paid to the four-month period, August to November, during which time unease in the four provinces is reflected in strife within His Excellency's twelve-man cabinet. The stormy omen of August --this month is characterized by "a huge unseasonal tropical storm"(p. 93; emphasis added)--foreshadows "the bloody events of November"(p. 218). And this anomic chain of events culminates in yet another coup in the novel's penultimate chapter. "Penultimate chapter" is meant to recall penultimate month [of the year] ("the bloody events of November"): at this stage both the year and the action of the novel are "speeding to a close." The last chapter of the novel, as we have already seen, concerns itself with a child's naming ceremony. Thus, the story of General Ahmed Lango's--the new coup-leader's--[mis]rule is yet to be, as that of the military regime at the end of A Man of the People has not been, told. But the particulars of either story can be deduced from Sam's reign of terror. Through Sam's dictatorship in Anthills of the Savannah, Achebe paints a picture of the consequences of a coup--any coup--like Sam's, Ahmed Lango's, or the one at the end of A Man of the People that turns out to be little more than "another self-serving act in [a] continuing drama of pain and misery."[11]

The Fictive Picture

Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe share the tendency to concretize, present the vivid, or describe graphically. To be sure, the dramatic mode is much closer to the artistic temperament of either Soyinka or Aidoo than it is to that of Armah or Achebe. It is apparent, however, that these four novelists, all heirs to a story-telling tradition that emphasizes dramatization, ensure that action is vividly delineated in their fiction. The resulting "picture" is essentially "fictive."[12]

Achebe's Anthills suggests that in the unending blood and tears drama enacted on the post-colonial African stage, the military officer, like Sam or Ahmed Lango, plays the part of "those virulent, misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa" (AOS, p. 52). (In Opera Wonyosi, Idi Amin and Jean-Bedel Bokassa appear, in the words of the playwright, as "the two singularly repellent and vicious" examples of "the continent's spawn of political and moral mutants.")[13] The suggestion is that the antics of such "freaks" in life as in art are theatrical. We note, in this connection, that Sam's career as an officer in the Army is a part written by his boyhood headmaster, John Williams, for him to play:

> [Sam's] major flaw was that all he ever wanted was to do what was expected of him.... When...John Williams...told him that the Army was the career for gentlemen he immediately abandoned thoughts of becoming a doctor and became a soldier....
>
> John Williams,...whose favourite phrase was 'good and proper, pressed down and flowing over,' in describing punishment, probably made the best choice for Sam after all. He grew so naturally into the part, more easily...than he would have slipped into the role of doctor. (p. 49)

Initiative and self-worth have never been closely associated with Sam. It is very much in character that later, as Head of State, Sam will attend his first OAU meeting and return home to speak "like an excited schoolboy about his heroes; about the old emperor who never smiled nor changed his expression no matter what was going on around him.... 'I wish I could look like him,' said His Excellency wistfully, his thoughts obviously far away"(p. 52). The "schoolboy," whose headmaster told him to enter the Army and he did, apparently never grew up. His Excellency sees in "the old emperor" a schoolmaster of sorts who could write the appropriate script for his new role as Head of State. Thus, it is not until after Sam meets with both the emperor and "President-for-Life Ngongo, who call[s] [him] his dear boy," that he begins to see "for the first time the possibilities for...drama in the role of an African Head of State and [decide] that he must withdraw into seclusion to prepare his own face and perfect his act"(p. 53). Sam the actor is His Excellency the automaton. This Head of State is noticeable for "his sense of theatre. He is basically an actor and half of the things we are inclined to hold against him are no more than scenes from his repertory to which he may have no sense of moral commitment whatsoever"(p. 50). The motive power of this automaton are pre-recorded "scenes from his repertory" and, characteristically, he has "no sense of moral commitment whatsoever." Since this creature of habit with a "sense of theatre" is primarily programmed to kill, we expect things to go wrong. And they do:

> '[A]ll this new theatre of the absurd that Sam is directing to get rid of me [Ikem] and to intimidate Chris, what's it in aid of? Diversion, pure and simple. Even the danger I see looming ahead when the play gets out of hand, what has any of this to do with the life and the concerns and the reality of ninety-nine percent of the people of Kangan? Nothing whatsoever.'
>
> ....
>
> '[Sam] wants to kill us! He is mad.... His acting has got into his head, finally.' (pp. 146, 147)

If His Excellency is an actor and Kangan is the theatre for his performances, it is partly because the people of Kangan know about theatre. The market place, where people of all walks of life often meet, is the setting for drama and the dramatic: "the whole of Gelegele Market is one thousand live theatres going at once"(AOS, p. 47). "Theatre," in this sense, is a way of life. To write about the ordinary people of Kangan's way of life in a novel is to fictionalize the "live theatres" and dramatize the fiction. If His Excellency were participating in this type of popular/populist theatre, he would have been a good leader of his people. The truth--and this distinction is important--is that His Excellency is directing a different kind of theatre: a "new theatre of the absurd." And this "new theatre" has nothing "to do with the life and the concerns and the reality of ninety-nine percent of the people of Kangan."

Chris and Ikem are aware of the parallel development of distinct types of theatre: His Excellency's whose cast comprise Kangan power brokers, the privileged one percent, and the Gelegele Market variety whose cast consist of the ruled, the "ninety-nine percent of the people of Kangan." Since Chris and Ikem are initially identified with His Excellency, Sam, they are guilty by association and through complicity. This explains why the novel's opening chapter is entitled "First Witness--Christopher Oriko" and the fourth chapter, "Second Witness--Ikem Osodi." Achebe does not overemphasize this trial motif; but it is implied that Chris and Ikem are witnesses at a trial whose jurors are "the People," the dispossessed ninety-nine percent, those described at the end of the novel as "'All of Us'"(p. 228). Chris and Ikem are also close enough to His Excellency's regime to "witness" its betrayal of the populace's trust and concerns. But at "the [climactic] crossroads"(p. 114) of both history and destiny, Chris and Ikem cast their lot with the underprivileged people of Kangan. In Anthills "class suicide" is not a Marxist abstraction: Chris and Ikem "'appease an embittered history'"

(p. 220) with their lives. In death Chris and Ikem make their peace with themselves, with history and with "All of Us."[14]

Ikem Osodi indicates that the main function of Sam's "new theatre of the absurd" is "[d]iversion, pure and simple." His Excellency's play and play-acting divert attention from his responsibility to the Kangan citizenry over whom he exercises power. If nothing seems to be what it really is, if the distinction between appearance and reality is blurred, then it is because in His Excellency's "new theatre of the absurd" "to act" is to lie, pretend or make believe. His Excellency's Cabinet, for example, which meets ever so often to discuss matters of state and make weighty decisions, turns out to be merely "'a circus show'"(p. 118). Those who have usurped the power of the Cabinet constitute an equally clownish but more patently clannish group which meets not in the Council Chamber but at the Presidential Retreat, Abichi. The ostensible reason given to the public in general and to "invited" guests like Beatrice in particular for meetings at the Retreat is "a small private dinner"(p. 70) or a "party"(p. 106). While language yields the inference that the unofficial political party meets at so-called parties at the Retreat, action and context suggest that the carefully selected guests--who are, by definition, not "party" members--are unwitting collaborators in an elaborate charade meant to present the assembly of "the new power-brokers around His Excellency"(p. 76) as an ordinary social gathering. In fact, the Presidential Retreat itself is an "irresponsibly extravagant" monument to diversion of both attention and money. Chris and Ikem engage in "one of their fierce arguments" in Beatrice's

> presence over the vast sums spent on the refurbishment of the Retreat. Money, incidentally, which had not been passed through the normal Ministry of Finance procedures....
>
> 'Retreat from what? From whom?' I [Beatrice] recall [Ikem] demanding with characteristic heat. 'From the people and their basic needs of water..., of simple shelter and food. That's what you...[retreat] from. You retreat up the hill and commune with your cronies and forget the very people who legitimize your authority.' (p. 73)

In the world of Anthills, attention is so consistently diverted from reality that fiction becomes the only reality in much the same way in which Wole Soyinka suggests through Egbo that his fiction marks "'[a]n interlude from reality.'"[15]

The interlocking relationships between irony, the dramatic, and the fictionality of fiction are handled brilliantly by Achebe in Anthills. In a memorable scene, His Excellency is reported to have been "'deeply wounded'" because Chris and Ikem had taken his merely playing a part for real and "[asked] of [his] fiction that it shall be [literally] true":[16]

> '[A]fter the referendum [Sam] had complained bitterly...that I [Chris] had not played my part as Commissioner for Information to ensure the success of the exercise and that you [Ikem] had seen fit to abandon your editorial chair at the crucial moment and take your annual leave.'
>
> ....
>
> 'I reminded him that he never really wanted to be Life President. That made him truly, hopping mad. I didn't, he said, and you know I didn't but the moment it was decided upon you had a clear responsibility, you and Ikem, to see it succeed. You chose not to. I never before heard so much bitter emotion in his

voice.' (p. 147; author's emphasis)

Sam "'never...wanted to be Life President.'" This is the part His Excellency is playing; this is the fiction. And his old friends Chris, the Commissioner for Information, and Ikem, editor of the National Gazette, are expected to know better than to take him literally. Indeed, what is perceived as mistaken reading of the codes of fiction--which in Anthills are state codes--is taken so seriously by the Head of State that his old friends become his worst enemies. Ikem soon loses his job and his life. Chris takes the hint and goes into hiding; but ultimately he too loses his life. Since the world of Kangan corresponds to that of Anthills of the Savannah and fiction is the only reality in either world, mistaken readings of fictional codes are considered as disruptive of state security as they are of the novel's integrity. It is equally significant to observe that after Ikem's death and until his own demise, Chris survives the search and scrutiny of the secret police, appropriately referred to in officialese as "the State Research Council"(p. 14), by moving from place to place under various aliases and disguises. To survive as fictional character, Chris has to appear to be what he is not and count on the Research Council's suspension of disbelief. Consequently, an Army officer, detailed to track Chris down, tells Beatrice [and the reader] that "'I know where the horse is. But I don't want to find him. Get him moved'"(p. 179). Capt. Abdul Medani is only ostensibly looking for Chris. He wins the reader's admiration by maintaining this pretext. Within the text, he protects Chris's disguise and new identity by referring to the former Commissioner for Information, who is on the run, as a metaphoric "horse."

In Anthills's game of the hunter and the hunted, the survival of the hunted--in this instance, Chris--depends on the effectiveness of forms of disguise as they are manifested in, for example, metaphor (like "the horse" as a form of figurative "disguise" in its own right) and the illusion of reality:

> [E]ven in his hurried run Chris had still left himself scope for heightening the drama of the chase. This apparent luxury made his tight corners not only more enjoyable to him but on occasion went so far as to offer him the illusion that he had turned hunter from hunted. (p. 188)

"The illusion" of turning "hunter from hunted" is facilitated by having Emmanuel Obete, Chris's comrade-in-hiding, plant a fictitious story in the National Gazette: "[t]he commissioner for Information, Mr. Christopher Oriko," is said to have "left the country in a foreign airliner bound for London disguised as a Reverend Father and wearing a false beard"(p. 186). The new editor of the Gazette publishes this "fiction" (p. 190) without verifying its details: it does not occur to the editor to do anything other than suspend disbelief. Nor does it occur to Customs Officials at Kangan's airports to confirm or deny the story. Even soldiers and police[wo]men, trained as they are to be suspicious, suspend disbelief: at various "check-points...[t]he soldiers and police...waved cars through rather inattentively. Chris was almost certain that Emmanuel's Gazette story must be more than marginally responsible for thus putting the law off their guard"(p. 191). "'Unbelievable!'" cries Chris (p. 190); but surely Chris of all people must and does know that fiction attempts to make the unbelievable believable.

When Capt. Medani tells Beatrice "'I know where the horse is[;] [b]ut I don't want to find him,'" he becomes a willing accomplice in a different kind of fiction. Earlier, he had signalled his intention to participate in this type of fiction through a coded message: "'[m]y people have a saying which my father used often. A man whose horse is missing will look everywhere even [o]n the roof'"(p. 177). "My people" and "my father" suggest a commitment to the tradition of one's forebears and imply identification, however tentative at this stage, with the "'ninety-nine percent of the people of Kangan'"(p. 146). In other words, Abdul Medani may have been forced by circumstances to play the role of "Captain" in His Excellency's "new theatre of the absurd"; but his heart has always been with the theatre of his "people." The implied analogue to His Excellency's "new theatre of the absurd" is a new fiction of the absurd whose aim is to provide "a smokescreen behind which...victim[s]" are "eliminate[d]"(p. 186). Thus, the new theatre/fiction of the absurd is destructive of both mind and body, while the "one thousand live theatres going at once" at Gelegele Market (p. 47), like good old story-telling which "'do[es] no harm to anyone'"(p. 125), teach delightfully. With this distinction in mind, Chris's and Ikem's willful misreading of His Excellency's fiction ("'he never really wanted to be Life President'"[p. 147]) assumes additional significance.

The reader of Anthills is expected to readjust the usual codes of fiction for a better assessment of His Excellency's anomic variety of fiction that functions as "smoke-screen" for "victim[ization]" and "eliminat[ion]." It is, therefore, in the light of willful suspension of belief that the reader should take comments like "[His Excellency] is certainly sticking to his promise to do things constitutionally"(p. 163). The narrator's dose of irony usually makes it all the more difficult for the reader to swallow the accompanying fictive capsule "of the absurd": "His Excellency was living up to his threat to do things constitutionally even in the face of all the provocations"(p. 145). But the author knows that critics of African literature tend to be as committed to literal-mindedness as His Excellency is bound to violence. Consequently, irony and subtlety in Anthills coexist with direct, even blunt, statement of "facts": "since the death of Ikem," for example, the government has refused

> to turn over his body to his people for burial under the provocative pretext that investigations were still proceeding into the circumstances of his death! (p. 195; emphasis added)

And:

> [T]he BBC which had already broadcast news of Ikem's death carried an interview between their Bassa correspondent and Chris.... In a voice full of emotion but steady and without shrillness Chris had described the official account of Ikem's death as 'patently false.' How could he be sure of that? Because Ikem was taken from his flat in handcuffs and so could not have wrenched a gun from his captors. So you are saying in effect that he was murdered? I am saying that there is no shred of doubt that Ikem Osodi was brutally murdered in cold blood by the security officers of this government. (pp. 172-173)

In direct, even blunt, language, His Excellency's "promise to do things constitutionally" is either a "provocative pretext" or "'patently false.'"

It is clear, then, that His Excellency's sense of theatre is placed at the disposal of his own brand of fiction. We note further that distinctions between fictions in Achebe's Anthills have implications for fiction-analyzing. The writer of fiction presents the reader with a tissue of "lies" and expects him or her to respond in a way similar to Abdul Medani's "I know where the horse is. But I don't want to find him." Part of the joy of reading fiction is derived from the reader's awareness that s/he is the writer's accomplice. "I know that this is a tissue of 'lies,' yes, I am aware that it is an illusion of reality," the reader says to him- or herself, "but I am going to suspend disbelief and read it as if it were real anyway." The knowledge that what I am reading is a tissue of "lies" or an illusion of reality informs my suspension of disbelief and is central to my appreciation of the fiction. It is against such a background that Achebe dramatizes the fictionality of his fiction. In addition to the generalization that fiction is the only reality in Anthills of the Savannah, we note that the author draws attention to particular strands in the composite tissue/text. In these strands the novelist invites the reader subtly, ironically, or directly to suspend belief. By intentionally foregrounding the falsity of intratextual "false[hood]" and "provocative pretext," the author encourages the realization that suspending disbelief when the reader reads the composite tissue/text called Anthills of the Savannah is a conscious and informed, not arbitrary and uninformed, act.

The Telling of the Tale and the Tale of the Telling

The story of Anthills of the Savannah and the way that story is told raise a couple of related observations: first, that Achebe is much more forthright in his latest novel than in previous ones about his conviction that the telling of the tale is as important as the tale and, second, that the very process of focusing attention on the telling generates its own tale [of the telling]. The author says of Anthills that "the very nature of the story is one of the key issues in this novel."[17] Conventional wisdom encourages the novelist to tell his story and the critic to analyze "the...nature of the story." To such prescriptivism Achebe's response "boils down to a simple plea for the African novel[ist]. Don't fence [him or her] in."[18] Anthills of the Savannah provides the most telling evidence yet, and thus marks the culmination of this study's emphasis, on fictionalizing as fiction-analyzing.

At the Cabinet meeting with which Anthills opens, the Attorney-General refers to the Commissioner for Information as "the Honourable Commissioner for Words." The Commissioner for Works is understandably apprehensive: "'It sounds too much like me'"(p. 7). If little is heard or seen of the Commissioner for Works but a lot is heard and seen of Chris, the Commissioner for Information, Ikem, the editor of the Gazette and Beatrice, the graduate-in-English-turned-Secretary, it is because in the world of both Kangan and Anthills the only things that work are words. Achebe's work of art is made up of words. And the author underlines the word work in "work of art" by drawing attention to the palpability of words--words are presented as the "building-block[s]" of "all kinds of thoughts" and works of art:

> World inside a world inside a world, without end. Uwa-t'uwa in our language. As a child how I [Beatrice] thrilled to that strange sound with its capacity for infinite replication till it becomes the moan of the rain in the ear as it opened and closed, opened and closed. Uwa t'uwa t'uwa t'uwa....
>
> Uwa t'uwa was a building-block of my many solitary games. I could make and mould all kinds of thoughts with it. I could even rock it from side to side like my wooden baby. (p. 85)

This is Beatrice recalling her childhood delight in words for their own sake, their "capacity for infinite replication," their "strange sound[s]" which provide onomatopoeic "thrill"

("Uwa t'uwa t'uwa t'uwa") and poetic possibilities ("...the moan of the rain"), their ability to encapsulate "thoughts," and for the words' playful palpability ("I could even rock [them] from side to side like my wooden baby"). The child turns out to be the mother of the woman who graduates with first-class honors in English. The child, mother and woman are created by Achebe who makes it clear that the discovery of the resourcefulness of words, in this instance, predates formal instruction in classrooms at home or abroad.

It is with words that the author of Anthills presents his fictive picture. Indeed, words' "capacity for infinite replication" allows for the creation of "[fiction] inside a [fiction] inside a [fiction], without end." As the fiction looks at and into its own processes, it draws attention to its "building-block[s]" and simultaneously underscores both the making and the telling of the story. Achebe provides readers with the opportunity to appreciate a well told tale in the making. "The bearded old man" from Abazon puts the role of the story-teller in his society into perspective:

> 'To some of us the Owner of the World has apportioned the gift to tell their fellows that the time to get up has finally come. To others He gives the eagerness to rise when they hear the call; to rise with racing blood and put on their garbs of war... to engage the invading enemy boldly in battle. And then there are those others whose part is to wait and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount its story.' (p. 123)

A story-teller himself, the old man gives an artist's view of imaginative literature in relation to immediately instrumental pursuits in the "real" world:

> 'The sounding of the battle-drum is important; the fierce waging of...war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards--each is important in its own way. I tell you there is not one of them we can do without. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story.' (pp. 123-124)

Having related the story-teller to his society and the story to other pursuits/disciplines, the old man focuses attention on the nature of the story:

> 'So why do I say that the story is chief among his fellows? The same reason...our people sometimes will give the name Nkolika to their daughters--Recalling-Is-Greatest. Why? Because it is only the story [that] can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars.... The story is our escort; without it, we are blind.' (p. 124)

In the appraisal of the nature of "the story" as "chief among his fellows," the old man's "Nkolika...Recalling-is-Greatest" functions in his sub-text the way Shakespeare's sonnet, "Not Marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments" ("Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / ...shall outlive this powerful rhyme"), for example, does in Western literature/discourse.

The old man goes on to share his considerable experience and insights with old and young story-tellers and interpreters of story-telling:

> 'Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us.'
>
> ....
>
> 'So the arrogant fool who sits astride the story as though it were a bowl of foo-foo set before him ...understands little about the world. The story will

> roll him into a ball, dip him in...soup and swallow him first....
>
> 'When we are young and without experience we all imagine that the story of the land is easy [to tell], that every one of us can get up and tell it.... True, we all have our little scraps of tale bubbling in us. But what we tell is like the middle of a mighty boa which a foolish forester mistakes for a tree trunk and settles upon to take his snuff.' (pp. 124-125)

We note that the old man's account of the story and its telling merges with a critique of the story-teller and storytelling. The novelist who, like an "arrogant fool," "sits astride [his] story," is being taught to do better. The "foolish forester" who mistakes "the middle of a mighty boa ...for a tree trunk" represents an inexperienced novelist or a critic who is both ignorant and presumptuous. When a critic with some experience like John Callahan notes that "[e]veryone has...a story to tell, but not necessarily a narrative to write[;] [t]he last depends on craft,"[19] he echoes the old man's contention that not everyone, certainly not the young and inexperienced, "'can get up and tell'" "'the story of the land.'" What the old man calls "experience" complements what Callahan refers to as "craft." Thus, when Achebe charges his narrative with the old man's eloquence he "reoralizes the written word with the old immediacy of oral storytelling."[20] The novelist, in effect,

> declares allegiance to both language and action, and calls for collaboration between writer, narrator, and reader, between oral and literary techniques and traditions, between performance and composition.[21]

The old man invokes Agwu, the tutelary spirit of "seers and diviners and artists," the better to make the point that the accomplished story-teller--the "disciple"(p. 125) of Agwu --to whom story-telling is a vocation cannot but be conscious of the fictionality of his fiction and the paramountcy of the telling:

> 'He is the liar who can sit under his thatch and see the moon hanging in the sky outside.... His...eye will see every blow in a battle he never fought. So fully is he owned by the telling that sometimes...he will turn the marks left on him by the chicken-pox and yaws he suffered in childhood into bullet Scars.' (p. 125; emphasis added)

The author's story draws as much attention to "the telling" as the old man does in the excerpt above. The old man, we recall, is talking to an audience of Abazon citizens. "The power of his utterance," observes the narrator, "held everyone captive from his very first words"(p. 122). Those "very first words" are the "building-block[s]" of the old man's "thoughts":

> 'How do we salute our fellows when we come in and see them massed in assembly so huge we cannot hope to greet them one by one, to call each man by his title? Do we not say: To everyone his due? Have you thought what a wise practice our fathers fashioned out of those simple words?... We can all see how that handful of words can save us from the ache of... handshakes and the headache of remembering a... multitude of praise-names. But it does not end there.' (p. 123)

And the old man, like the young Beatrice, proceeds to create a "world inside a world inside a world, without end" with "that handful of words." If Beatrice Okoh's exploration of Uwa-t'uwa's "capacity for infinite replication" provides a paradigm for Achebe's utilization of the potential of language for infinite signification, then the old man's story about stories, story-telling and the nature of the story provides a complementing microcosmic replication of the story of Anthills.

Explaining to his audience why he has not read the editorials Ikem writes in the Gazette, the old man says "'I do not know ABC'"(p. 122). He may not know the white man's language; but it is abundantly clear that he knows the ABC's (the "building-block[s]") of story-telling/fictionalizing. Beatrice, by contrast, knows the "ABC['s]" of local and foreign languages extremely well. "[H]er literary education [which] [can]not but...[sharpen] her perception"(p. 183) provides an intra-textual complement to the cultivated effortlessness of the old man's story-telling ability. The author who created these two characters embodies both of them. Consequently, consummate fictionalizing and "percept[ive]" fiction-analyzing enabled by "literary education" are dovetailed in Anthills.

In Anthills of the Savannah, as in No Longer at Ease, fiction-analyzing is reflected in action and plot. Chris's journey to the north of Kangan on "one of a new generation of transports known...as Luxurious"(p. 200) reminds one of Obi's trip to Umuofia on "a mammy wagon called God's Case No Appeal."[22] When the traders with whom Obi was travelling "burst into song...Obi...tried to translate it into English, and for the first time its real meaning dawned on him":

> On the face of it there was no kind of logic or meaning in the song. But as Obi turned it round and round in his mind, he was struck by the wealth of association that even such a [seemingly] mediocre song could have.... [T]hought Obi, the burden of the song was 'the world turned upside down.' He was pleased with his exegesis and began to search in his mind for other songs that could be given the same treatment. (NLAE, p. 46)

Obi brings the sensibility of a student of literature to bear on the action of the novel and, in the process, engages in the sort of literary analysis the metatext implies that it more than deserves. The traders' song's simple diction and structure, like those of No Longer at Ease, are, upon closer examination, anything but "mediocre." "The burden of the song" is reflective of "the burden" of the novel in its entirety. In both No Longer at Ease and Anthills, the critic who fails to turn the narratives "round and round in his mind" cannot sufficiently appreciate the "kind[s] of logic [and] meaning[s]" imbedded in them and will, therefore, miss the texts' "wealth of association." The old man in Anthills reiterates this point in appropriate metaphor:

> '[T]he lies of those possessed by Agwu are lies that do no harm to anyone. They float on...top of [the] story like the white bubbling at the pot-mouth of new palm-wine. The true juice of the tree lies coiled up inside, waiting to strike.' (p. 125)

The surface details of the fiction discussed in this study may be so compelling as to have, like "new palm-wine," an intoxicating effect on the reader or critic, but "'[t]he true juice of the [story] lies coiled up inside.'" In No Longer at Ease and Anthills of the Savannah we observe spectacular cases in which the underlying structure--what is "coiled up inside"--gathers enough momentum to penetrate the novels' surface and eject fiction-analyzing terminology like "the wealth of association," "exegesis" and "the burden of the song." We note of such eruptions that the graduate in English functions either as active agent (like Obi in No Longer at Ease) or catalyst (Beatrice Okoh in Anthilis).

Christopher Oriko, the Significant Other in Beatrice's life, is struck by the inscriptions on the bus which takes him from Bassa to Abazon:

> The one at the back of the bus, written in the indigenous language of Bassa...said simply: Ife onye metalu--What a man commits. At the sides the inscriptions switched to words of English: All Saints Bus; and in front, also in English, they announced finally...Angel of Mercy. (p. 202)

These inscriptions "tease," "exercise"(p. 202), and finally "occupy [Chris's] mind":

> The christian and quasi-christian calligraphy posed no problem and held no terror. But not so that other one: Ife onye metalu, a statement unclear and menacing in its very inconclusiveness. What a man commits...Follows him? Comes back to take its toll? Was that all? No, that was only part of it, thought Chris, the most innocuous part in fact. The real burden of that cryptic scripture seemed to turn the matter...around. Whatever we see following a man, whatever fate comes to take revenge on him, can only be what that man in some way or another, in a previous life if not in this, has committed. That was it! So those three words wrapped in an archaic tongue and tucked away at the tail of the bus turn out to be the opening segment of a full-blooded heathen antiphony offering a[n]...exposition of suffering. The guilty suffers; the sufferer is guilty. (p. 203)

Chris, like Obi before him, subjects a segment of the fiction in which he participates to critical analysis. Twenty-seven years separate No Longer at Ease from Anthills of the Savannah; but Achebe suggests through contextual recall and verbal echo (Obi's "the burden of the song" and Chris's "[t]he real burden of that cryptic scripture," for example) that he is as interested in the telling of the story (fictionalizing) and the tale of the telling (fiction-analyzing) now as he was then.

Comparativism, Pedagogy, and the Novelist as Teacher

The suggestion that "there are competing canons, not a single Canon; that there are traditions, not a or the Tradition"[23] is a variation on what Modin tells Mike in Why Are We So Blest?: "'[t]here are other myths, you know.'"[24] That suggestion and its variant are implied in Ama Aidoo's "one doesn't have to be so patronizing about oral literature... [for] [t]here is a present validity to oral literary communication."[25] In Anthills of the Savannah, Beatrice's exploration of Uwa-t'uwa's "capacity for infinite replication," the informed old man's admission that he "do[es] not know [the white man's] ABC," and Chris's pleasant surprise at the rich suggestiveness of "those three words [Ife onye metalu] wrapped in an archaic tongue" all draw attention to the other tradition Achebe borrows from, transforms, and incorporates into his synthetic whole.

When Christopher Oriko refers to "the indigenous language of Bassa" as "an archaic tongue," he presents an outsider's view of a language that is anything but "archaic" to the people of Bassa. We note, however, that, in this instance, Chris is playing the role of decoder, interpreter or critic. And in this role his assumed outsider point of view translates into critical distance. Ordinarily, Chris shares with Beatrice and the old man an affectionate insider delight in "our [local] language[s]"(p. 85). The conjunction of insider and outsider points of view in Chris is reflective of the dialogue between local/insider and foreign/outsider perspectives that takes place in Anthills. In a novel written in a "foreign" tongue, attention is nonetheless focused on the tradition and sign system that sponsor the local perspective. Achebe has said that the language he uses in his fiction is "a new English, still in...communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings."[26] In Anthills the author is keen on showing how the "new African surroundings" alter the [English] language and impinge upon the world of the fiction. The Englishness of "the pen is mightier than the sword," for example, is "altered" by the "African surroundings" when the old man speaks in character: "'the fierce waging of...war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards...is important in its own way.... But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story'"(p. 123-124). Later, the reader learns that the "'ancestors [of Kangan] made a fantastic proverb on remote and immediate causes. If you want to get at the root of murder, they said, you have to look for the blacksmith who made the matchet'"(p. 159). This particular proverb is to Kangan society what the expression "remote and immediate causes" implies in the world of the white man. The suggestion is neither that the proverb owes its existence to the expression nor that the expression is "influenced" by the proverb. The operative words inferable from the foregoing are intertextuality and comparativism. The old man, for example, could not have been "influenced" by either "the pen is mightier than the sword" or the possible correlation between "eagle-feather" and quill-pen because he "do[es] not know ABC."

The omniscient narrator invokes the principle of comparativism in pasages like:

> The sign-writers of Kangan did not work in dark and holy seclusions of monasteries but in free-for-all market-places under the fiery eye of the sun. And yet in ways not unlike the monk's they sought in their work to capture the past as well as invent a future. (p. 201)

The difference between the sign-writer and the monk is established first, and then common ground is sought and found. In this way, different entities are shown to be comparable. An intertextual analogue is apparent in Achebe the essayist's:

> We have learned from Europe that a writer or an artist lives on the fringe of society--wearing a beard and a peculiar dress and generally behaving in a strange, unpredictable way. He is in revolt against society, which in turn looks on him with suspicion if not hostility.[27]

"Wearing a beard and a peculiar dress" is patently facetious; but the artist who "lives on the fringe of society" brings to mind the monk "work[ing] in dark and holy [seclusion]." As artists, the African and his Western counterpart both face perils. The latter has to deal with "suspicion if not hostility" while the former works ominously "under the fiery eye of the sun." It is the nature of the peril that is different. Similarly, African and Western artists may use the same language (like English, French or Portuguese) to sponsor different ends and underwrite differing systems of signification, but however distinguishable these ends and sign systems are they may yet be eminently comparable. "The sign-writers of Kangan" and the Western artist/monk are a case in point.

The religious connotations of "monk" and "monastery" are recalled when Beatrice links comparativism and intertextuality to metaphoric signification in particular:

> 'There was an Old Testament prophet who named his son The-remnant-shall-return. They must have lived in times like this. We have a different metaphor, though; we have our own version of hope that springs eternal. We shall call this child AMAECHINA: May-the-path-never-close.' (p. 222)

Comparable "times," but "different metaphor." Furthermore, Anthills suggests that "different metaphor" is a function of different tradition and mythology:[28]

> 'The original oppression of Woman was based on crude denigration. She caused Man to fall. So she became a scapegoat...a culprit richly deserving of whatever suffering Man chose thereafter to heap on her. That is Woman in the Book of Genesis. Out here, our ancestors, without the benefit of hearing about the Old Testament, made the very same story differing

> only in local colour. At first the Sky was very close to the Earth. But every evening Woman cut off a piece of the Sky to put in her soup pot, or as in another version, she repeatedly banged the top end of her pestle...against the Sky whenever she pounded the millet.... Whatever the detail of Woman's provocation, the Sky finally moved away in anger, and God with it.' (p. 97)

When Achebe's Ikem Osodi talks about the "'oppression of Woman...based on crude denigration," he is subtly linking gender to race as womanists do. The word "denigrate" literally means "blacken": "DE (nigrare... niger black) + -ATE."[29] Thus, the "story" may be "the...same" for Western Woman and African Woman; but it "[differs] in local colour." And that difference alters the presentation of the story substantially. We note, in a related context, that similarity (in stories or the times) does not necessarily imply either common origin or "influence": "'[o]ut here,'" we read, "'our ancestors, without the benefit of hearing about the Old Testament, made the very same story'"(p. 97; emphasis added). In tracing the parallel developments of traditions and myths which support different sign systems we should not lose sight of their independent origins. This point is considered crucial enough to warrant reiteration:

> 'The New Testament required a more enlightened... strategy.... So the idea came to Man to turn his spouse into the very Mother of God, to pick her up from right under his foot where she'd been since Creation and carry her reverently to a nice...pedestal. Up there, her feet completely off the ground[,] she will be just as irrelevant to the practical decisions of running the world as she was in her bad old days. The only difference is that now Man will suffer no guilt feelings....
>
> 'Meanwhile our ancestors out here, unaware of the

> New Testament, were working out independently a parallel subterfuge of their own. Nneka, they said. Mother is supreme. Let us keep her in reserve until the ultimate crisis.... Then, as the world crashes around Man's ears, Woman in her supremacy will descend and sweep the shards together.'
>
> (p. 98; emphasis added)

Biblical myth is distinguished from that of "our ancestors" by force of contrast, while the "parallel" but "independent" development of those myths provides the backdrop for competing traditions.

At the root of the competing claims of myths, traditions and canons is the question of interpretation. The interpreter in Achebe has traditionally been like Okeke in Things Fall Apart who interprets the Christian/Biblical message of a missionary like Rev. James Smith to the local audience. When the claims of the missionary and "the spirits and leaders" of Umuofia clash, Okeke feels obliged to interpret "wisely." On such occasions the interpreter is both mediator and textmaker. Without his mediating secondary text the primary text of either the missionary or "the spirits and leaders" of Umuofia is mute. (When critics of African literature fasten their gaze on the surface details in Achebe's first novel like so-called "religious conflicts," "the impact of Christianity on traditional Africa," and so on, what they miss is the barely disguised drama in which the missionary, whose faith enjoins him to believe what he has not seen, plays the role of the writer of imaginative literature; the interpreter plays his namesake, the critic; while the would-be candidate for conversion plays the role of reader. Since the missionary and the prospective convert do not speak the same language, either's "message" is what the interpreter says it is.)[30] It becomes apparent in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters that

> [a] myth common to [African], Greek and Christian mythologies, that of a messenger who mediates between God/gods and men, is also firmly grounded in the sacred origin of "hermeneutics." "Before Schleiermacher introduced the discipline of general hermeneutics," writes [E.D.] Hirsch, "the term 'hermeneutics' was used almost exclusively by biblical interpreters, and indeed the name itself suggests a sacred origin, being cognate with Hermes, the messenger of the gods."[31]

African writers implicitly recall the anachronic exclusivity of biblical hermeneutics and go on to situate their texts in "general hermeneutics." More to the point, it is implied that "biblical interpreters" have no more exclusive rights to "the term 'hermeneutics'" than interpreters of Western literature have to "Canon" and "Tradition." There are, in effect, as many brands of hermeneutics as there are competing canons, contrasting traditions and differing myths. And these differences and contrasts, as we have seen, allow for comparative and intertextual studies.

Students and critics of African literature who have not read Achebe's "The Novelist as Teacher" must be very few indeed; but fewer still are those who are sufficiently appreciative of the novelist's attempt to sensitize readers to his novels' literariness. The repetitive cycle of essays on

Achebe's proverbs, presentation of Igbo society, and theme of tradition versus change, for example, could certainly have been enriched if we had read Achebe closely and intelligently enough. One of the lessons the novelist "teaches" the reader of Anthills is that intertextual and comparative studies deserve more attention than influence-hunting and echo-recording. Informed study of Achebe almost always yields unexpected insights. And Anthills, for its part, provides a fascinating [meta]critical dimension to comparativism and intertextuality.

After Ikem Osodi's suspension from the editorship of the National Gazette, he gives a lecture at the University of Bassa. The former editor is, as one would expect under the circumstances, very critical of the government in power. Ikem calls his presentation a "meditation" and he begins it with "'a little story'" told "to remarkable dramatic and emotional effect" and concludes with this observation: "'storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit --in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever'"(p. 153). The omniscient narrator's assessment of the "meditation" is that

> [i]t was a brief presentation, twenty to twenty-five minutes long, that was all; but it was so well crafted and so powerfully spoken it took on the nature and scope of an epic prose-poem.
>
> (p. 153; emphasis added)

The "craft" with which criticism of the government of the day's "theatre of the absurd" takes "on the nature and scope of an epic prose-poem" is very much that of Ikem Osodi, who is "'a fine journalist...[and] an even finer poet, in [John Kent's] opinion one of the finest in the entire English language'"(p. 62). Neither the poet-activist nor the poet-as-critic is a new phenomenon, but criticism as "prose-poetry" is a phenomenon associated with the Euro-American, post-modernist metacriticism of Hillis Miller and Harold Bloom in particular. The introduction to Bloom's A Map of Misreading, for example, is subtitled "a meditation upon misreading" and in it the critic-theorist makes the point that "[a]s literary history lengthens, all poetry necessarily becomes verse-criticism, just as all criticism becomes prose-poetry."[32] Ikem's "meditation" recalls Bloom's on "misreading," while the latter's "all criticism becomes prose-poetry" is echoed in the former's criticism [of the Kangan government] that "took on the nature and scope of an epic prose-poem." But Achebe does not appear to be laboring under Bloom's or Hillis Miller's "influence." Readily available to the African writer is a tradition that allows for criticism of chiefs, literary works, and dramatic performances alike to be encoded in the rhythm and lyrics of songs, the "message" of talking drums, or the stylized movements of a professional dancer.[33] To Ikem and Anthills's omniscient narrator, then, there is nothing avant-gardist about criticism of any kind as "an epic prose-poem." Indeed, when the old man, about whom much has already been said, gets up to speak at the meeting of Abazon citizens, his speech soon turns into a story, and the story generates a complementing story about the telling which in turn merges with analysis of the [generic] story and the nature of its telling. In Harold Bloom's terminology, as the old man's "[speech] lengthens,...[his story] necessarily becomes [the telling], just as [his story-analyzing] becomes [the nature of the story]." Using a system of signs to talk about a series of signs is second nature to the old man who "do[es] not know ABC." The admission of ignorance about the foreigner's/outsider's "ABC" brings into play the insider's school of thought--a mode of perception and evaluation that appreciates and honors an old man so versed in local tradition that he literally makes a composite art of story-making, story-telling, and story-analyzing. The story of Anthills suggests that the coexistence of schools of thought guarantees comparative and intertextual studies.

A View from Vantage Point: Metaphoric Savannah and Metonymic Anthills

It is appropriate to conclude one's study of Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah with a return to the title and the opening chapter because it is only in retrospect that their significance in the novel's overall architectonics can be fully appreciated. "Anthills" in Achebe's novel are "of the savannah," and the savannah is Abazon territory. Abazon, we recall, is the province that voted against His Excellency in the presidential referendum held a couple years before the novel's chronological beginning. The giver of rain apparently said "No" to Abazon when the province cast its "No" vote at the referendum. Visitors to Abazon now drive "straight into scrubland which two years without rain had virtually turned to desert"(p. 209). Deprived of rain, the Abazon landscape is "scorched" by the sun. His Excellency turns out to be both the giver of rain and "[t]he fiery sun"(p. 3). And the delegation of Abazon leaders which arrives at Bassa is aware of this:

> 'When we [the people of Abazon] were told two years ago that we should vote for the Big Chief [His Excellency] to rule forever and all kinds of people we had never seen before came running in and out of our villages asking us to say yes...we knew that cunning had entered that talk.... So my people and I said No.'
> ....
> 'But that was not the end. More shifting-eyes people came and said: Because you said no to the Big Chief he is very angry and has ordered all the water bore-holes they are digging in your area to be closed so that you will know what it means to offend the sun. You will suffer so much that in your next reincarnation you will need no one to tell you to say yes whether the matter is clear to you or not.'
> ....
> 'So we [have] c[o]me to Bassa to say our own yes and perhaps the work on our bore-holes will start again and we will not all perish from the anger of the sun.' (pp. 126, 127)

Two years of misery and deprivation have humbled the people of Abazon. In the tropic language of Achebe's text, Abazonians have become so many little ants in as many vulnerable "anthills in the scorched [Abazon] landscape"(p. 209). Ants and anthills alike are easily crushed under the giant foot of "the Big Chief."

Since the Abazon savannah owes its "scorched landscape" to His Excellency's mood and policy, Anthills supports the inference that there can be as big and long a scorched savannah belt with accompanying anthills as there are groups of people who displease "the Big Chief." Thus, one does not have to be a citizen of Abazon to be an "ant," nor does one have to be in the Abazon province to live in an "anthill." In retrospect, the reader better appreciates why in the opening chapter of Anthills the Cabinet member does "nothing...but... lie close to [his] hole, ready to scramble in"(p. 2). The same point is made in more explicit terms than before: "[a]s soon as [the Honorable Commissioner for Education] had sniffed peril in the air he had begun to disappear into his hole, as some animals and insects do, backwards"(p. 3). Honorable Commissioners who comprise the Cabinet "beg[i]n to crawl out into the open again" only after His Excellency "had sounded the All Clear and told [them] it was all right...to commence [their] protestations"(p. 5). For "a deferential Cabinet waiting with bated breath on the Chief"(p.8), the Council Chamber in the nation's capital, Bassa, is a nest of discontent for bloated ants. "Anthills of the Savannah," then, signifies concurrently a state of being, a state of mind, an anomic state of affairs, and the sorry state of a disobliging province. An important addition to the foregoing is the observation that, in the fictional world of Anthills, the reader sees the "real" Abazon in Ikem Osodi's "prose-poem" --the one he wrote long before his "meditation" at the University of Bassa--rather than "out there."

In his "Hymn to the Sun," Ikem borrows "the voice of legend" to relate how Abazon came to be:

> The earth broke the hoes of...grave-diggers and bent the iron tip of their spears. Then the people knew the time had come to desert their land, abandoning their unburied dead and even the dying.... [B]y way of comment the voice of legend adds that a man who deserts his town and shrine-house...must carry death in his eyes. Such was the man and such his remnant fellows who one night set upon the sleeping inhabitants of the tiny village of Ose and wiped them out and drank the...water in their wells and took their land and renamed it Abazon. (pp. 32-33)

Abazon comes into being through "renam[ing]"; its past is imbedded in "legend." And that "legend" assumes contemporary relevance in Anthills:

> Great Carrier of Sacrifice to the Almighty: Single Eye of God! Why have you brought this on us? What hideous abomination forbidden and forbidden and forbidden again seven times have we committed or else condoned, what error that no reparation can hope to erase?
>
> ....
>
> The trees had become hydra-headed bronze statues so ancient that only blunt residual features remained on their faces, like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year's brush fires.
>
> ....
>
> [T]he heat of the brush fires merely added to the fire of the Sun. And soon...there was no fodder left to burn.
>
> No one could say why the Great Carrier of Sacrifice to the Almighty was doing this..., except that it had happened before, long, long ago in legend. (pp. 30, 31, 32)

We know of the legend of yesteryear. We now witness the legend of tomorrow in the making. If "the trees," like the legend of "long, long ago," "remained...like anthills...to tell ...about last year's brush fires," then today's anthills of the savannah will likewise survive as emblems that attest to this year's "fire of the Sun." All this may remind us of the cliché "history repeats itself." In Achebe, however, what repeats itself is [the] histoire as story, tale or narrative:

> And now the times had come round again out of storyland. Perhaps not as bad as the first times, yet. But they could easily end worse....
>
> So [the people of Abazon] send...a deputation of elders to the government...to seek help. (p. 33; emphasis added)

Fictional "times" appropriately "come...out of storyland" and repeat themselves in Ikem's "Hymn" and in Achebe's narrative. Ikem's "Hymn to the Sun" is inspired by the anomic times--marked by His Excellency's "new theatre of the absurd"--in general, and the arrival of the Abazon delegation to Bassa, in particular. The "Hymn," then, provides a framework, at once cryptic and yet, in retrospect, well-defined, for both the "story" of the Abazon delegation and Achebe's narrative.

The reader sees part of the Abazon province s/he has read and heard so much about near the end of the novel. The journey to Abazon, the "province which,...in a curious paradoxical way[,] [had been] the distant sustainer of...[the late Ikem's] best inspirations,...became for Chris and Emmanuel something of a pilgrimage"(p. 195). "From [his] authoritative windowseat in [the bus,] Luxurious"(p. 205), Chris notices a definite change as the bus enters south Abazon:

> The air current blowing into the bus seemed to be fanned from a furnace. The only green things around now were the...spiked cactus serving as shelter around desolate clusters of huts...in the dusty fields. (p. 209)

The scene and the emotions it evokes are familiar. Chris and the reader had been transported imaginatively to this land of desolation through the agency of Ikem's "Hymn to the Sun." And so

> [a]s the bus plunged deeper into the burning desolation Chris reached into his bag and pulled out Ikem's unsigned 'Pillar of Fire: A hymn to the Sun,' and began to read it slowly with fresh eyes, lipping the words like an amazed learner in a literacy campaign class. Perhaps it was seeing the anthills in the scorched landscape that set him off revealing in details he had not before experienced how the searing accuracy of the poet's eye was primed not on fancy but fact. And to think that this was not the real Abazon yet; that the real heart of the disaster must be at least another day's journey ahead!
> ....
> When he had read the prose-poem through and... over again he said quietly to Emmanuel: 'You must read this,' and passed the paper to him. (pp. 209, 211)

"The prose-poem" reflects and refers to the scene "out there" and the scene "out there" bears witness to "the searing accuracy of the poet's eye." What we have here is a large scale replication of the nightclub scene in The Interpreters. Wole Soyinka's interpreters observe a dancer called Owolebi in a sketch and on the dance floor:

> Of the interpreters gathered in the nightclub, it is the artists Kola (painter) and Sekoni (sculptor) who first "see" the dancer. To the reader, as to Egbo, this dancer comes to "life" as a sketch, a drawing

> by Kola; she "exists" in art before we see her ("the original") on the dance floor. As Kola's drawing of her passes from Egbo to Lasunwon, and to Bandele, and so on, these interpreters begin to read the scene before them (a lone dancer on the dance floor) and Kola's text (the representation of this lone dancer in drawing) as intertexts: the original refers to the representation, and the representation refers to the original.[34]

Achebe's "poet's eye," like Soyinka's artist's, "[is] primed not on fancy but fact." We note, however, that while the "fact" is observable on the dance floor in its entirety in The Interpreters, the observable "fact" of south Abazon in Anthills "[is] not the real Abazon yet;...the real heart of the disaster must be at least another day's journey ahead!" And the heart of the matter at hand is that neither Chris, Emmanuel nor the reader gets to see "the real Abazon" on this "pilgrimage." "A large crowd on the road half-a-kilometre or so ahead"(p. 211) informs everybody that there had been a coup. In the ensuing confusion Chris is shot, and the chapter--the penultimate one incidentally--ends with the sergeant who shot him fleeing "into a red sunset"(p. 216). The concluding chapter takes us away from the scene of death on a symbolic journey back to life and to the "naming ceremony ...for Elewa's [and Ikem's] baby-girl"(p. 217). Thus, "the real Abazon" in Anthills of the Savannah "exists" only in Ikem's prose-poem.

If "Abazon" is synonymous with "savannah" and "the real Abazon" can only be found in a prose-poem, then the "real" "anthills of the savannah" "exist" likewise only in that prose-poem. In this way, Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah "[takes] on the nature and scope of [a]...prose-poem." We come to the same conclusion through a different route: Ikem Osodi's "meditation," presented to an educated audience at the University of Bassa, is as critical of "virulent, misshapen freaks like Amin[,]... Bokassa"(p. 52) and His Excellency, and insistent on "'the imperative of struggle'"(p. 153) in the face of such usurpers' reign of terror as Achebe's novel, in its entirety, obviously is. If Ikem's presentation is said to have been "so well crafted...it took on the nature and scope of an epic prose-poem"(p. 153), then Achebe's text which enables and embodies both this "epic prose-poem" and the earlier "prose-poem" is at the very least similarly "well crafted" and capable of "[taking] on the nature and scope of [a]...prose-poem." Reviewers of Anthills like Nuruddin Farah ("[t]here is a great deal of poetry in it") and Sarah Taylor ("Achebe's...prose [is] lyrical and poetic") come to similar conclusions.[35] To associate Anthills of the Savannah with a "prose-poem" is to pay tribute to its engaging story, the fine tuning of its language, and the skillfully constructed plot that gives the novel its architectonic quality.

Chinua Achebe and the African novel have come a long way since Things Fall Apart (1958). Literal-minded and mistaken interpretations of Things Fall Apart, for example, may suggest an interpreter who knows little about the African novel;

but literal-minded and uninformed interpretations of *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) certainly suggest more than ignorance about the African novel. Our hypothetical interpreter cannot know much about the novel as a genre. Nuruddin Farah, a brilliant novelist in his own right, concludes his review of Achebe's latest novel with "*Anthills*[*of the Savannah*] calls for a celebration." I can find no better way to conclude my own discourse on *Anthills* than endorsing that call for celebration--a celebration of Chinua Achebe's achievement to date as an African novelist.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: CRITICISM, CRITICAL THEORY, AND [WEST] AFRICAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

> I have liberally borrowed related examples from Western critical arguments to compare aspects of the workings of...[B]lack structures of meaning, to ground my analysis in referents familiar to my readers, but also to argue, implicitly, that the central questions asked in Western critical discourse have been asked, and answered, in other textual traditions as well.
>
> --Henry L. Gates, Jr., Preface to The Signifying Monkey

"Do Not Dictate To Your Author"

> Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice.
>
> --Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?"

This dissertation opens with my interpretation of various critics' interpretations of the African novel in particular and African literature[s] in general. The chapters following the first have been devoted to interpreting select fiction by Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe. My methodology objectifies the notion that the secondary texts of criticism are open to interpretation like the primary, imaginative texts that feed, and are in turn fed by, the former. I have identified the engaging surface of each novel discussed with a primary level of signification at which the average reader suspends disbelief and becomes the novelist's accomplice in the enjoyment of imaginative literature. Undergirding the primary level of signification, I have argued, is a secondary one at which the informed reader or prospective critic suspends presumption and prejudice and becomes the novelist's co-worker at fiction-analyzing. Armah's Teacher who appropriates and reinterprets Plato's exemplum of the cave[1] and Solo who, as "'Traducteur,'" is in effect "translator," "interpreter," and/or "decoder";[2] Soyinka's Ofeyi who draws attention to "'[t]hose painters and musicians who [leave] some works unfinished...deliberately'" in an anomic season;[3] Ama Aidoo's Sissie who compiles "notes" on her trip abroad with a view to "compar[ing]" them with her fictional "Brother[s']";[4] and Achebe's Beatrice Okoh, the graduate in English whose "literary education could not but have sharpened her perception,"[5] each personifies the link between the primary and secondary levels of signification in the text in which s/he appears.[6] The suggestion is that fictionalizing and fiction-analyzing exist in the novelist's mind as one activity.

We recall Obi's efforts to subject the fiction he is a part of to critical analysis. After turning a song "round and round in his mind," he comes to the conclusion that "the burden of the song [is] 'the world turned upside down.'"[7] In Anthills, the inscriptions on a bus "tease and exercise

[Chris's] mind" until "[t]he real burden" of one of them "written in the indigenous language of Bassa" bursts upon him in a flash of insight.[8] And this is what Achebe, the interpreter-essayist, speaking on his own behalf has to say:

> When my first novel was published in 1958, a very unusual review of it was written by...Honor Tracy, who is perhaps not so much a critic as a literary journalist. But what she said was so intriguing that I have never forgotten it.... The burden of the review itself was...: these bright Negro[es]...who talk so glibly about African culture, how would they like to return to wearing raffia skirts?[9] [emphasis added]

Achebe is as interested in "the burden" of interpretations of his work as fictional characters like Obi and Chris are in "the [real] burden" of segments of the fiction in which they participate. The verbal echo is significant. Honor Tracy carries her self-revelatory, pre-text[ual] baggage to the literary text and asks of it that it "enforce[s] [her] own prejudices."[10] Since she is additionally ignorant of the text's signifying depths, she cannot be the novelist's ally on either the primary or secondary levels of signification. She is, therefore, as irrelevant to the telling of the story, the nature of the story, and the story-teller as Obi and Chris are indispensable to Achebe's fictionalizing as fiction-analyzing. "The burden" of my own argument is that verbal echo links Achebe the novelist--and in this capacity, the creator of Obi and Chris--to Achebe the essayist and underlines, in the process, the suggestion that writing fiction and writing about [writings about] fiction are inseparable activities in the author's mind.

The Series of Signs Used to Interpret a Series of Signs

> POLONIUS: What do you read, my lord?
> HAMLET: Words, words, words.
> --William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Language is the medium of the critic and the novelist alike. Critics' response to and assessment of the language of fiction, for example, affect the language of criticism. Thus, once a critic like Adrian Roscoe is hoodwinked by the deceptive "simplicity" of Achebe's language, he cannot help but ramble about "the implications which this holds for [the novelist's] style and method":

> Here the characteristics of traditional African literary art and the present need for good pedagogy meet; for a docile audience must be taught by lessons that have a strong central line and little sidetracking; hence, in the novelist's case, a narrative with one central figure and few digressions; a species of language that is clear and familiar, which stirs the emotions and drops anchors in the memory.... Aware of these necessities, Achebe developed his technique accordingly. His books *do* have a simple narrative line; their canvas *is* dominated by one central figure; imagery *is* clear and his style has the added virtues of lucidity and economy.[11]

In this short but representative piece, Roscoe's prejudicial *horizon of expectation* and his questionable competence stand out in startling relief. If he actually knew "traditional African literary art" he could not have committed presumptions like "docile audience" to writing. The fundamental issue at stake is well worth bringing to the fore. If, as

Roscoe claims, the best of African writers--for Achebe is certainly one of Africa's foremost novelists--write to a predictable formula ("a docile audience _must_ be taught by lessons that have a strong central line and little side-tracking"[emphasis added]), the language of their work "is clear and familiar," the imagery is equally "clear," and the "narrative line" has to be "simple," then who needs a critic --any critic--to tell anybody anything about such bow-wowing especially packaged for the "[imbe-] docile"? Adrian Roscoe's horizon [of expectation and interpretation] is a very limited one: the critic can see little beyond the enveloping, "mind-forg'd" fog. His foggy "species of language" and intent limit his relevance to _literary_ criticism. In the words of the old man in Achebe's _Anthills_--ironically, a prospective "docile audience" in Roscoe's "species of [critical] language"--such a critic is like "'the arrogant fool who sits astride [his subject] as though it were a bowl of foo-foo set before him by his wife.... The [subject] will roll him into a ball, dip him in...soup and swallow him first.'"[12] The person who cherishes the name of "literary critic," on the one hand, but whose professed subject is "simple" works by "simple" minds for "a docile audience," on the other, is aptly described in _The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born_ as "'the _chichidodo_ itself.... [T]he _chichidodo_...bird...hates excrement with all its soul. But...only feeds on maggots.'"[13] Roscoe's language damns him: you can tell the species--the critic as "_chichido-_

do bird"--from his "species of language."

I return to the fictional world of *The Beautyful Ones* and *Anthills* for appropriate figures of thought and speech to apply to Adrian Roscoe because I want to recall, and in the process underline, the point made in this dissertation's opening chapter that some African texts do anticipate mistaken readings and, in fact, dramatize that foreknowledge. If Roscoe had paid close enough attention to the last chapter of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*--a novel which, incidentally, provides material for Roscoe's "simple narrative line," "one central figure," "clear" language and imagery paradigm--he could have been alerted to the novel's anticipation of mistaken reading[s] and been a better critic of Achebe and of African literature.

The concluding chapter of Achebe's first novel opens with the arrival of the District Commissioner "at Okonkwo's compound at the head of an armed band of soldiers and court messengers." Okonkwo is not at home and Obierika leads the Commissioner and his armed entourage to

> the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling....
> 'Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him,' said Obierika. 'We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming.'
> *The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs*.
> 'Why can't you take him down yourselves?' he asked.
> 'It is against our custom,' said one of the men.[14]
> [emphasis added]

The pages of African literature criticism before and after

1958 are littered with instantaneous transformations from "resolute [literary critics]...to...student[s] of primitive customs." Significantly, the fictional District Commissioner plans on writing a book:

> Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man [Okonkwo] who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could...write a whole chapter on him.... He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. (pp. 147-148)

And with that Achebe concludes Things Fall Apart. This first novel, then, anticipates a book which arises out of the novel and, in part, re-traces the novel's story line ("One could... write a whole chapter on [Okonkwo]"). But this book's language (the prospective author is infuriated by what he sees as Africans' "love of superfluous words"[p. 146]), journalistic mode ("[e]very day brought...some new material"), pronounced anthropological bias (the author is a "student of primitive customs"), point of view and proprietary air ("The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes...") are at odds with those of Achebe's novel. In this way, the novelist incorporates into his action and plot, first, what Things Fall Apart is not and, second, the mistaken readings it can do without. The implications of the foregoing for literary criticism are foregrounded in the second novel, No Longer at Ease. Okonkwo's grandson, Obi, is a graduate in English who, true to his training and orientation, attempts to "examine critically...the mainspring of his actions"[emphasis added] and experiences the aesthetic pleasure that comes with being "struck by the wealth of association that even...a [seemingly] mediocre song could have."[15] The critic who "examine[s]" the action of the Achebe text "critically" and more often than Obi does "the mainspring of his actions" would, "in doing so[,]...[uncover] a good deal"[16] beneath surface details like corruption, proverbs, and the problems of the "been-to." It seems to me that when critics and reviewers opted for anthropological reductionism at the expense of literary criticism of the first two novels, they were, in effect, contributing to the serialized publication of "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger." By 1964 "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes..." had been "published" in book form and was being passed from reader (Captain Winterbottom) to reader (Tony Clarke). Since this text is counter-fiction misnamed "criticism," it is appropriately inaugurated in the fictional world of Achebe's third novel, Arrow of God.[17] "Fiction as Criticism of Fiction" neither began nor ended with Charles Larson.

To find out why various interpretations of African narrative seem to leave a lot to be desired, we need to return to the primary texts. And I am going to trace my steps back to Things Fall Apart to demonstrate how the language of African fiction and that of criticism were short-changed the moment we confused the function of proverbs in fictional narrative with their role in "real life" traditional society.

In the opening chapter of Achebe's first novel, the omniscient narrator draws attention to a prominent element in the range of tropes and rhetorical figures employed in the fictional world:

> Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the I[g]bo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.[18]

Okoye speaks "plainly" before feeling the need to resort to "half a dozen" proverbs because there is a finite number of proverbs appropriate to particular occasions. In this instance, we are not told what these proverbs are because they do not "belong" to Okoye: he borrows them from a communal stock. This is why he speaks "plainly" in his own right (as in direct speech) and says the proverbs (as in indirect or reported speech). Here, in the specific instance of Okoye's conversation with Unoka, we have the illusion of the use of proverbs in traditional society. The proverb is considered a repository of, because it encapsulates, traditional wisdom. Such a conception of the proverb precludes free-play by any- and everybody under any and every circumstance, for if the proverb embodies traditional wisdom and every Wole, Kole, and Sule speak in proverbs, then the force of logic compels us to endorse the absurdity that the African can speak little else other than traditional wisdom! Thus, the African proverb, as it is perceived by historians, anthropologists, folklorists and sociologists, is a rich tropic capsule for special, and no less appropriate, occasions. This is the quintessential historicist conception of the proverb. And Achebe reminds the reader of this well-known concept[ion] the better to underline his novelistic variant by force of contrast.

Following Okoye's plain-speaking and proverb-saying is the generalization that "[a]mong the I[g]bo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten." The Igbos in Things Fall Apart are fictional ones in whose world "conversation" is an "art" because language itself is used in a special way. And proverbs constitute an important tropic dimension to "the art of conversation"[my emphasis]. To the Igbos who people Achebe's fictional world "the palm-oil with which words are eaten" is as familiar as coca-cola is to Americans who eat hamburgers. So familiar, in fact, are the proverbs in the fictional narrative that they cannot all be expected to encapsulate profound traditional wisdom. The context of Okoye's conversation with Unoka buttresses this point. Unoka owes Okoye two hundred cowries and the latter has come to the former's hut to tell him in plain and figurative language that he wants his money back:

> As soon as Unoka understood what his friend was driving at, he burst out laughing. He laughed loud and long...and tears stood in his eyes.... [In] the end, Unoka was able to give an answer between fresh outbursts of mirth. (p. 6)

In the exchanges between creditor and debtor, the proverb functions as a reminder of time-honored obligations and as diplomatic complement to plain-speaking. Okoye is not interested in savoring the profundity of "traditional wisdom" for its own sake. He wants his money/"cowries" back. And the persuasive potential of the appropriate proverbs is manipulated as a means to utilitarian ends. The effect of all this on Unoka, however, is to make him "burst out laughing...loud and long." Thus, in addition to the inference that it is impossible for all proverbs in fiction to be carriers of profound wisdom, we learn that proverbs and the contexts in which they are used can generate little more than "outbursts of mirth." What the novelist is doing, then, is to broaden the scope of, by deviating from, the well-known conception of the African proverb as a privileged container of traditional wisdom. The operative process here is what the Russian formalists called "making strange": Achebe de-automatizes a familiar historicist, socio-cultural and anthropological concept and, in the process, invokes the novelistic coding that is central to an informed appreciation of Things Fall Apart. Once the presumptuous critic had divested the proverb of its novelistic coding, the stage was set for absurdities ranging from reading Achebe's first novel as if it were a "Book of Proverbs" to the suggestion that proverbs accounted for the term "African" in African literature!

Eustace Palmer's observation that Achebe "use[s]...proverbs in order to give a genuinely African flavour to...characters' speech,"[19] for example, obscures the fact that there is nothing peculiarly "African" about proverbs qua proverbs. Constitution and function define proverbs' culture-specificity. A related point worth emphasizing is that if, to Achebe's fictional Igbos, "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten," then these Igbos and readers sensitized to the generic and cultural codes which shape and define "the art of conversation" will be disposed to seeing proverbs function as special forms of abstract discourse. The mental reconstruction of the literal referents of proverbs may be undertaken by those not versed in "the art of conversation" or in the "art" of reading fiction in general and African fiction in particular.

Owen Miller's comments on "the way referential statements function when inserted into a fictional narrative and are thereby subjected to various generic codes" are apposite to our discussion:

> A proverb such as 'all that glitters is not gold' is ...an example of pure allegory. In one sense this statement is referential and provides a mental reconstruction of gold glittering. But...the literal referential meaning passes almost unperceived since one reads the proverb at an allegorical level. In other words, the allegorical code inhibits the unfettered construction of the fictional referent ('gold glittering') and substitutes a conceptual world, or rather produces in the mind of the reader an abstract discourse ('appearances are deceptive'). Thus statements which we may identify discursively as being referential, may, when inserted in a text which is generically coded...function in the same way as abstract discourse.
>
> One might even go further and say that it is doubtful if any modern fictional text is entirely free of some kind of symbolic coding which under-

> mines the free construction of the fictional referent. As [Gérard] Genette has pointed out with respect to [Ernest] Hemingway's most realistic novel, a referential statement such as 'he felt cold sweat run down his back' is translated without hesitation by the reader as 'he was afraid.'[20]

Miller, the critic, discusses in some detail what Achebe, the novelist, could only hint at in the opening and concluding chapters of Things Fall Apart--that proverbs function differently in fiction from the way they do in socio-anthropological studies like a District Commissioner's "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

We can go through the pages of various studies of proverbs in Achebe, in particular, and African fiction, in general, and find in the interest in the proverb for its own sake coupled with the socio-anthropological coloration of the critics' language less than adequate understanding of the language of Achebe's and African fiction.[21] Bernth Lindfors's and Gareth Griffiths's contrasting perspectives on the subject, for instance, are symptomatic of the conflicting signals critics look for in, and are given by, the proverb. Lindfors's "The Blind Men and the Elephant" defends the approach he had taken in an earlier essay, "The Palm-Oil with which Achebe's Words are Eaten," against the opposing position taken in Griffiths's "Language and Action in...Chinua Achebe." Lindfors "[examines] Achebe's proverbs out of context"[22] while Griffiths suggests that "we view the proverbial devices not in isolation but as part of a total linguistic structure."[23] These critics' essays make interesting reading since Lindfors's "defence" ("I am not entirely convinced that Griffiths' analytical procedures...always lead him in the best direction") concludes with this rather forthright admission:

> Griffiths quarrels with the basic critical assumptions upon which my case rests and then offers another way of looking at the same data which is so perceptive and revealing that I am forced to admit the cogency of his point of view.[24]

Griffiths's "perceptiv[ity]" and "revealing...cogency" are directly deducible from the oft-quoted trope, "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten": isolate "the palm-oil"/proverb from the "words" and you starve the latter, and bore the reader, to death. Discussing discrete elements of a literary text "out of context" or "in isolation" has always been a debatable, even questionable, methodology.

A basic problem undermines the best intentions of both Lindfors and Griffiths. "Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in?" is one of the "proverbs" both critics find important enough to disagree about its "classification" and significance.[25] But is the commonplaceness of that rhetorical question not matched by the triteness of the family of proverbs to which political hot potatoes, taking bulls by the horns, and putting all of one's eggs in a single basket, for example, belong? If the critic's attention is attracted by the hissing of a-snake-in-a-bag, then he has ignored the allegorical coding which, in fiction, applies as much to "'he felt cold sweat run down his back'" as it does to "Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in?" These observations hold good for the other "proverb" Lindfors quotes to lend support to the explanation he offers for the rhetorical question under discussion: "[a]s the old man puts it in another proverb, 'that is why we say that he who has people is richer than he who has money.'"[26] Even if we ignored the allegorical coding and looked for this "proverb"'s "literal referential meaning"(Miller, p. 21), it would still be difficult to avoid the observation that, as referential statements go, this one is far more impoverished than "'all that glitters is not gold,'" for example. "Impoverished" because "'that is why we say...'" suggests that Lindfors's "proverb" is only a fragment of a statement whose function is explicatory.

It is instructive to restore "proverbs" discussed in isolation to their original context[s]:

> 'Let the joking pass,' said the old man....
> 'Joshua is now without a job. We have given him ten pounds. But ten pounds does not talk. If you stand a hundred pounds here where I stand now, it will not talk. That is why we say that he who has people is richer than he who has money. Everyone of us here should look out for openings in his department and put in a word for Joshua.'...
> 'Thanks to the Man Above,' he continued, 'we now have one of our sons in the senior service.... It is in little things like this that he can help us. It is our fault if we do not approach him. Shall we kill a snake and carry it in our hand when we have a bag for putting long things in?' He took his seat.
> 'Your words are very good,' said the President. 'We

have the same thought in our minds.'[27] [my emphasis] The Lindforsian "proverb," then, is prepared for, explained, justified and conditioned by the context which the critic chooses to ignore. For an informed appreciation of the language of Achebe's fiction, the excerpt above provides valuable insight. The President of the Umuofia Progressive Union links the old man's "words" to "thought." Those "words," enriched by apt aphorism ("'he who has people is richer than he who has money'") and rhetorical figure ("'Shall we kill a snake...?'"), are themselves synecdochic. The old man's speech--his synecdochic "words"--please the President ("'[y]our words are good'"); but the latter is also sensitive to, and appreciative of, the figures of speech and [aphoristic] thought with which the old man's "words" had been "eaten." Spoken words and complementing figures constitute the visible tip of a submerged whole: "'[w]e have the same thought in our minds.'" This discriminating employment of stylistic and rhetorical strategies is integral to and enabled by the author's language system--a mode of discourse whose seeming simplicity is deceptive. It is apparent from the foregoing that criticism-for-the-docile practised by the likes of Adrian Roscoe, on the one hand, and the aesthetics of dismemberment sponsored by those who would catalogue proverbs and discuss them "out of context," on the other, do a disservice to both the language of African fiction and criticism of the fiction. If the signs of the times are anthropological ones and our horizon of expectation remains as foggy as it is prejudicial, then we cannot have come far from being "student[s] of primitive customs."

"Tradition" and the Living Author

> Can one theorize effectively about an evolving process?
> --Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism

> It is all this cocksureness which I find so very annoying.
> --Chinua Achebe, "Where Angels Fear to Tread"

Critics ought to be sufficiently aware of the continuous succession of changes that have characterized African literature to date. The authors discussed in this study have been writing novels which "speak" of, situate themselves in, and embody flux. The texts' thematic dynamism is complemented by structural and linguistic revisionism. With varying degrees of emphasis, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Why Are We So Blest?, Season of Anomy, Our Sister Killjoy and Anthills of the Savannah raise questions about the criticism of fiction and about the very nature of ["extended"] texts of prose fiction with a view to demonstrating the questions' linkage. The fictional world, then, becomes the scene for on-going discourse on discourses. Caught up in the twin processes of defining him- or herself and his/her genre, Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe continue to map out new territories of and for novelistic expression. And we can, in fact, broaden the scope of our argument to advantage. If we thought we were beginning to figure Armah out on the strength of his first three novels, his last two must have given us cause for revaluation. Students and critics of African literature[s] are still assessing the implications of the transition from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood to Caitaani Mutharabaini and beyond. And over two decades after Achebe's A Man of the People comes Anthills of the Savannah. Indeed, the history of the African novel since the mid-1940s has been, in the main, one of living authors who are heirs to dislocations of the past and participants in contemporaneous adaptation to change. In the fictional world of these authors, "dislocations" and "adaptation" are a function of both structure and language. Living authors grow and, usually, move in unexpected directions. They tend, for example, "to do unheard of things with [the language of fiction],"[28] and the critic's language, poetics or models will have to reflect this. The pontifical tendency in the criticism of the African novel seems to me as surprising as it is out of place. Cocksureness and dogmatism must give way to critical dicta that are potentially corrigible.

Chinua Achebe's "thoughts" on the foregoing are illuminating:

> Many years ago...I attempted (not too successfully) to get my colleagues to defer a definition of African literature.... I suggested that the task might become easier when more of our produce had entered the market.... I was saying in effect that African literature would define itself in action.... [A decade later,] I still think it was excellent advice even if it carried a hint of evasiveness.

> ....
>
> I do admit to...the fear...of hurrying to a conclusion when the issue is still wide open.... The world of the creative artist is like that. It is not the world of a taxonomist whose first impulse on seeing a new plant or animal is to define, classify, and file away.
>
> ....
>
> [A]ll these prescriptions and proscriptions, all these dogmas about the universal and the eternal verities, all this proselytizing for European literary fashions..., all this hankering after definitions may in the end prove...futile.[29]

Given the nature of literature and the relative youthfulness of the African novel in particular, the ultimate "futil[ity]" of the "prescriptions and proscriptions" of the pontificating critic is ordained. In the heat of the "debate about literature and its social and aesthetic functions"[30] in post-colonial Africa, Achebe's "hint of evasiveness" is anything but a sign of weakness. One recalls, in this connection, the "quality" which, according to John Keats,

> went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature.... I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.[31]

It is "[l]iterature[s]" that both Keats and Achebe are talking about. And in imaginative literature, as in criticism of the literature, "reaching after [incontrovertible] fact and [quantifiable] reason" can be deservingly "irritable." For a body of literature that is in the process of "defin[ing] itself in action," concepts like "Provisional Poetics," "Corrigible Models," and "Negative Capability" suggest neither the critic's abdication of his right to interpret, criticize, and theorize, on the one hand, nor the writer's "indifference to truth...[and] refusal to deal with ideas," on the other. What is implied in all this is that "[o]nly the self that is certain of its integrity and validity can do without the armor of systematic certainties."[32]

Wole Soyinka's contribution to our discussion has direct implications for criticism and critical theory:

> Asked...whether or not I accepted the necessity for a literary ideology, I found myself...examining the problem from the inside,...from within the consciousness of the artist in the process of creating. ... My response was--a social vision, yes, but not a literary ideology. Generally the question reflects the preoccupation neither of the traditional nor the contemporary writer in African society but of the analyst after the event, the critic.... The danger which a literary ideology poses is the act of consecration...and...excommunication. Thanks to the tendency of the modern consumer-mind to facilitate digestion by putting in strict categories what are essentially fluid operations of the creative mind ..., the formulation of a literary ideology tends to congeal...into instant capsules which, administered ...to the writer, may end by asph[y]xiating the creative process.[33]

African literature is comparable to an on-going "event." The "essentially fluid operations of the creative mind" is reflected in this literature that "define[s] itself in [on-going] action." It is therefore reasonable to expect literary models which shape, and/or are deducible from, African texts to be dynamic enough to allow for change, growth, and revaluation. This implies that wholesale importation of prepackaged models, for example, is of little merit. And with that an important segment of this dissertation's critical and theoretical concerns comes full circle: the essence of our argument lends support to the basis for the discomfort--expressed and discussed in the opening chapter--with the application of Sunday Anozie's structuralist, Emmanuel Ngara's stylistic, and Georg Gugelberger's Marxist/Marxian models.

"Back to the Future": Continuities and Complementarities

> Roots, be the network of my large
> Design.
> --Wole Soyinka, "O, Roots!"
>
> It's de thought dat makes de difference.... So...new thoughts [have] tuh be thought and new words said.
> --Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

The next generation of critics of African literature and orature will need to subscribe to "accent[s]" that "[fall] differently from of old."[34] The limitations of echo-recording and influence-peddling, literal-mindedness, pontification, and rhetorical posturing are already obvious. For my own part, in reviewing critical discourses and [re-]assessing various texts, I have often wondered if "the moment of importance came not [t]here but [here]."[35] The African novelist's first encounter with the story, which is central to "fiction" and/or the "novel," was at home and in the earliest stages of schooling in his/her own language. Older members of the family and, later, teachers did and still do the telling of stories. The themes of these stories are familiar. The young enjoy the stories which at the same time pose a challenge: one is expected to remember both the story and the telling because soon one will have to take center stage and, in turn, tell stories. It does not take long for young listeners, the budding story-tellers, to learn that a cycle of stories gets told over and over again, and that in each instance of re-telling it is not what the story is about--the broad outlines are already known--but the manner of presentation or how the story is told that sustains their interest. It is not uncommon for the young to insist on having grandpa Danquah rather than cousin Obeng tell the same story because they prefer the former's telling to the latter's. Before the acquisition of adequate resources of language--their own or somebody else's--sufficiently to "analyze" or "criticize" the story, the young learn and put into practice a couple of related, seminal ideas: that, first, "stories" are told in a special way and that, second, the telling is as important as, if not more important than, what is told. Upon closer examination, a seemingly paradoxical generalization holds good in African literature studies: identify a good African novelist in Portuguese, French or English and you will have discovered a person who has built upon seminal ideas about story-telling learnt in his/her own language at his/her formative and most impressionable [early] years. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for instance, "grew up speaking Gikuyu." "My first encounter with stories and oral narratives," he writes, "was through Gikuyu." And the Kenyan playwright, novelist and essayist reminds us that "[t]he most essential element in the oral tale as in that of the novel is still the story, the element of what happens next. The artistry lies in the various devices for maintaining the story."[36] With all this in mind we can return briefly to Anthills of the Savannah and, in retrospect, better appreciate Beatrice Okoh's

> [W]orld inside a world inside a world, without end. Uwa-t'uwa in our language. As a child how I thrilled to that strange sound with its capacity for infinite replication....
>
> Uwa-t'uwa was a building-block of my many solitary games. I could make and mould all kinds of thoughts with it....
>
> My friendship with...words began...quite early.[37]

"Uwa-t'uwa," the "building-block of [young Beatrice's] many ...games...[and] thoughts," signifies the "Roots...of [many an African writer's] large / Design."[38] The authors discussed in this study fit that bill.

One of the curious developments in the interpretation of the African novel is some critics' insistence on amputating "form" from "content." The African writer's bewilderment at this learned nonsense is both predictable and understandable. Reference was made in the first chapter to J.P. Clark's amazement at the attention critics of African literature pay to "the amount of traditional ritual and modern rottenness ...found" in African novels at the expense of what the novelists "have done to...form."[39] We note now that the issue is brought into sharp focus in Phanuel Egejuru's interview with Chinua Achebe:

> Q: *As far as I can see, what you have added [to the novel genre] seems to deal with content rather than form*.
> A: I have a problem [with] drawing a line between form and content. I don't think you can alter the content without altering the form.[40]

Like J.P. Clark, Achebe is aware of local variations on

> a story-telling art called *Anansesɛm* by [the] Akan-speaking people [of Ghana]. The name, which literally means Ananse stories, is used both for the body of stories told and for the story-telling performance itself.... [Ananse] stories are not rigidly formed. Every one [of them] is intended to be given fuller composition and artistic interpretation by the Storyteller. He tries to prove his artistry...as he tells it. And it is to [the] artistry in the narration that the audience look for the aesthetic experience they seek.
> ....
> People come to a [story-telling] session prepared to be, in story-telling parlance, 'hoaxed.'... Hence in the course of a particularly entrancing story it is normal for an appreciative listener to engage in the following exchange:
> LISTENER: Keep hoaxing me! (*Sisi me*!)
> NARRATOR: I am hoaxing you and will keep on hoaxing you! (*Mirisisi wo, mesisi wo bio*!)
> The formula is practically a form of applause, an encouragement to the Storyteller to sustain his artistry.[41]

"Story-telling," to the initiated Akan/African, is a conjunction of the *story* and the *telling* with the former realized --literally, given *apparent* reality--by the latter. "Artistry in the narration" of *Anansesɛm* is as highly regarded as "the *art* of conversation" is in Okonkwo's society. We note too that traditional story-telling sessions allow for "an appreciative listener" to dramatize his/her role as the narrator's collaborator in an "exchange" that underlines the fictionality of the fiction. The listening audience appreciates, acknowledges, and encourages the storyteller's "hoaxing." Neither the listener nor storyteller asks of fiction that it be literally "true."

Under the title "Fictionalizing as Fiction-Analyzing," this dissertation has placed appropriate emphases on plurisignification, the fictionality of fiction, the inseparability of form and content, and on the need to valorize literariness over literal-mindedness. It is against this background that the study of select fiction by Armah, Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe has been one of continuities and complementarities. And it is appropriate that in concluding this study, in looking before and after as it were, we follow up on those continuities and complementarities. The differences between African writers are more often than not grossly exaggerated. The exaggeration is due, in part at least, to the commitment to theme or content following the separation of form from content. In this way, Chinua Achebe's captious remarks about the content of Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel, for example, are usually divorced from laudatory comments on form and style ("an impressive first novel," "well written"; "Armah's command of language and imagery is of a very high order indeed")[42] to facilitate the emphasis on content-analysis through acts of omission and commission.

The petty jealousies and real differences between African writers need not be glossed over; but there is little justification for exaggerating them:

> Anyone who knows the Nigerian literary scene [for example] must be aware of the constant swiping that goes on all around. Some observers at...Writers' Conference[s]...[comment] on the way we [criticize] ourselves and [poke] fun at each other's work.... No. We are not opposed to criticism, but we are getting a little weary of...the special types of criticism which have been designed for us by people whose knowledge of us is very limited.[43]

Moreover, the living author exercises the right to change (Armah's post-...Beautyful Ones endeavors, for instance), modify his views (even as Achebe "pick[s] on" Armah, he anticipates the Ghanaian writer "begin[ning] to do something else"),[44] reshape his vision (as in Anthills where Achebe's artistic vision of women undergoes major repairs for the better), or, like the "prodigal" persona in Christopher Okigbo's "Heavensgate," journey back in time at some future date "to rediscover the world he had been taught to despise."[45] The critic, enslaved by first impressions and usually frozen in the past, puts in "strict" and convenient rather than accurate categories what Soyinka describes as "essentially fluid operations of the creative mind." As a result, the student of African literature[s] is presented with a situation in which tigritudinists and negritudinists, the "bolekaja critics" and the Ogunist[s], traditionalists and [post]modernists, Afrocentrists and Eurocentrists, nonprogressivists and radicals, and so on, are said to be locked in [meta]critical combat. Thus cued to seeing differences, dichotomies and polarities, the reader understandably pays little attention to continuities and complementarities.

We return to the primary text and note in the relationship between Christopher Oriko and Ikem Osodi in *Anthills* a case study of differences that do not detract from continuities and complementarities. As editor of the *Gazette*, Ikem brings a different style to bear on a position that had been held by Chris. The latter reminds Beatrice Okoh that

> 'there is nothing concrete on which Ikem and I quarrel. What divides us is style not substance. And that is absolutely unbridgeable. Strange isn't it?'
>
> 'Very strange.'
>
> 'And yet...on reflection...not so strange.... [I]f you and I...quarrel over an orange we could settle it by dividing the orange or by letting either of us have it, or by handing it over to a third party.... But supposing our quarrel is that I happen to love oranges and you happen to hate them, how do we settle that? You will always hate oranges and I will always love them....'
>
> 'We could decide though, couldn't we, that it was silly and futile to quarrel over our likes and dislikes.'
>
> 'Yes,' he answered eagerly. 'As long as we are not fanatical. If either of us is a fanatic then there can be no hope for a settlement.... The mere prospect of *that*...leaves me emotionally drained and even paralysed.'[46]

In the late 1960s Ayi Kwei Armah acquired a taste for "beautyful" "orange." Chinua Achebe liked the shape of the "orange" but hated its taste and said so. With the passage of time, however, both writers have demonstrated *in practice* that "'it [is] silly and futile to quarrel over [their] likes and dislikes.'" The "birth" of "the beautyful ones" could not be willed into being by Armah in the late 1960s any more than

Achebe could in his post-colonial novel of 1966, A Man of the People. At the end of Anthills of the Savannah (1987), the reader celebrates the "birth" of the "unbearably beautiful" knowing full well that the "beautiful" and the "unbearable" are, in the words of Armah's "woman" (Maanan?), "'mixed... together!'"[47]

Whatever differences there may be between Achebe and Armah as "African writers" are not unlike those between the fictional characters, Chris and Ikem. "What divides" Chris and Ikem, we are told, "is...not substance" (in this context, socio-political vision) but "style" (mode of expression); but Chris learns soon enough, "on reflection" and through Beatrice's prompting, that one is better off without the fanaticism which sustains the "absolutely unbridgeable" division between style and substance. Achebe's text does not support this division. Rather, it suggests that style and substance are as much two sides of the same coin as Ikem and Chris fundamentally are.

Christopher Oriko recalls Christopher Okigbo. As the fictional Chris lay dying on "the wild scrubland" of south Abazon, his young friend Emmanuel cries "'Please, sir, don't go!'...tears pouring down his face"(Anthills, p. 216). In the preface to the Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo, Achebe writes about driving from Enugu to Ogidi one afternoon and hearing Okigbo's death announced on the radio:

> When I finally got...home and told my family, my three-year-old son screamed: Daddy, don't let him

die! He and Christopher had been special pals.[48]

The fictional Christopher Oriko and Emmanuel "had been special pals" too. "Daddy, don't let him die!" echoes "Please, sir, don't go!" But it is Ikem Osodi's vocation as poet-activist that replicates Christopher Okigbo's. Described as "'one of the finest [poets] in the entire English language'" (Anthills, p. 62), Ikem's pursuit of his socio-political vision ultimately demands of him nothing less than his life. Christopher Oriko and Ikem Osodi, then, personify differing aspects and impressions of the late Christopher Okigbo. Seemingly contradictory impulses ("what divides us is style not substance") belong to, and are bridgeable in, the complex character of a poet-activist-ancestor who admitted to having multiple "selves."[49] It is implied that the multifarious "selves" dedicated to creating and shaping African literature[s] may be divided by style and/or substance, but such divisions are neither "unbridgeable" nor necessarily destructive of continuities and complementarities.

The criticism of African literature and orature calls for new accents. In whatever forms these "new accents" manifest themselves, it is important that due attention be paid to Voice and "Roots,...the network of [the] large / Design." For one thing, Voice and Roots have the advantage of extending the range of continuities and complementarities discussed above to cover the Black diaspora. I am suggesting, in effect, that Voice and Roots have the potential to form the basis for an interpretative system for Black literatures with an impact comparable to, or even surpassing, that of the [Roman] Jakobsonian categories of Metaphor and Metonymy on Euro-American literary criticism. In Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), for example, Kabnis says "look at me now. Earth's child. The earth my mother." Soon after this we read:

> Kabnis: I'm here now an talkin's just begun. I was born an bred in a family of orators, thats what I was.
> Halsey: Preachers:
> Kabnis: Na. Preachers hell. I didnt say wind-busters. Y misapprehended me. . . I didnt say preachers. I said orators. ORATORS. Born one an I'll die one.[50]

Such African-American sentiments are echoed again and again in African literature. Gabriel Okara's "oracular" text, *The Voice* (1964), was followed by Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother...* (1971). After his first three novels, Ayi Kwei Armah returns to his roots and, in the process, gives "voice" to those roots in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973): the concluding couple of chapters in this text are appropriately entitled "The Return" and "The Voice" respectively. In his next novel, *The Healers* (1978), Armah gives "return to roots" structural expression. For this [historical] novel, Armah borrows from "the classical structure of Akan folk stories: seven sections with each section subdivided into six parts."[51] Additionally, Armah situates "Voice" in a great tradition: "this tongue of the story-teller, *descendant of masters in the arts of eloquence*,...Ano[w]a tongue, born for eloquence, continue your telling" [my emphasis].[52] And over six decades after publication of Jean Toomer's Cane, Kofi Anyidoho comes out with a collection of poems entitled Earthchild (1985). In "The Homing Call of Earth," the Ghanaian poet returns to Mother Earth:

> So now I come back home to Earth
> I will remake my little peace with death.[53]

The poet[-persona] "remake[s]" his "peace with death" to live his life to the full. The reinvigorated poet[-persona] now sings with "ancestral 'Voice'":

> ...those who took away our Voice
> Are now surprised
> They couldn't take away our Song.[54]

"Our Voice" belongs to all those Black writers before Jean Toomer and after Kofi Anyidoho who, "having survived by word of mouth[,]...[have] made of that process a high art."[55] This "Voice," rooted in orature as old as Mother Earth, has retained its "Song" in spite of "writing" and "literature" narrowly defined.

In recent times, it seems the West has come full circle in its odyssey "from [primary] orality through writing and print to electronic processing of the word" and "'secondary orality.'"[56] With a quaint mixture of timidity and enthusiasm, Walter Ong notes that

> with telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of 'secondary orality.' This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense,...and even its use of formulas.... But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious

orality.[57]

Chinua Achebe's Igbos, who have a high regard for "the art of conversation," would be more amused than surprised to "learn" that "deliberate and self-conscious orality" is the "modern" person's preserve. But it does turn out after centuries of denigration that the so-called "savage mind" of "the primitive man," with its characteristic predisposition toward "orality," "participatory mystique," "communal sense," and "use of formulas," has been prefiguring the modern man/mind and anticipating the (post)modern "global village"! "Na so dis worl' be."[58]

To those who have been looking at African literature and orature from the inside, the recent Euro-American fascination with neorhetoric, communication and speech-act theories comes as no surprise. Equally predictable is Harold Bloom's invocation of "the Hebrew word for 'word,' _davhar_," which "is concerned with oral expression," to underline his "American _recentering_...that...follows Emerson in valorizing eloquence, the inspired voice, _over_ the scene of writing" with a view to attenuating "the humanistic loss we sustain if we yield up the authority of oral tradition to the partisans of _writing_."[59] No, Black/African literature and orature do not need the services of apologists. What they have always needed, and woefully lacked, is insightful literary criticism. By focusing attention on select fiction by Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe, this dissertation substantiates the claim that the [West] African novel is better appreciated if we foreground the fictionality of the fiction, shed our prejudicial horizon of expectation, and instate literary competence, not literal-mindedness, as the criterion of relevance.

NOTES

Chapter One

1. Chinua Achebe, "Thoughts on the African Novel," Morning Yet on Creation Day (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1975), p. 83.

2. Onoge, "The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature," in Marxism and African Literature, ed. Georg Gugelberger (Trenton: Africa World, 1986), p. 31.

3. Henry L. Gates, Jr., "Criticism in the Jungle," Black Literature & Literary Theory, ed. H.L. Gates, Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 6-7; Anthony Appiah, "Strictures on Structures," in Black Literature & Literary Theory, p. 145.

4. Owen Miller, "Epilogue," Interpretation of Narrative, eds. M. Valdés and O. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 186.

5. G. Gugelberger, ed., Marxism and African Literature (Trenton: Africa World, 1986), pp. 11-12. Subsequent page references to this edition, to be preceded by the abbreviation MAL where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

6. Ayi Kwei Armah, "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction," ASEMKA 4(1976): 2, 3.

7. Joyce, Ulysses (New York: Vintage Bks., 1961), p. 528.

8. Nabokov, Lolita (New York: Berkley, 1977), p. 272. References to Joyce, Nabokov and Conrad in the dissertation are, in part, based upon the observation that these writers share with a good number of African writers physical exile (émigré status) and/or a subtler form of exile: writing in a foreign language. These "writers-in-exile" are usually noticeable for the breath of fresh air they bring to the language and form of fiction.

9. Colin Mercer, "Paris Match," in Criticism and Critical Theory, ed. J. Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984), p. 44.

10. Margolin, "Conclusion" to Interpretation of Narrative, p. 183.

11. Gates, "Criticism in the Jungle," p. 4.

12. Tekpetey, "The Trickster in Akan-Asante Oral Literature," ASEMKA 5(1979): 78. Subsequent page references to this essay are incorporated into the text.

13. Appiah, "Strictures on Structures," p. 130.

14. Amega Dunyo, "It is in the hands of Destiny," in Guardians of the Sacred Word, ed. Kofi Awoonor (New York: Nok, 1974), p. 57.

15. Armah, Two Thousand Seasons (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 170-171.

16. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. Wade Baskin, eds. Charles Bally et al. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), pp. 66, 67.

17. Henry Gates, "The Blackness of Blackness," Black Literature & Literary Theory, pp. 285-286.

18. I use the term "African-American" instead of "Afro-American" in this context for reasons similar to those documented by John Callahan in his "Author's Note" to In the African-American Grain (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Callahan uses "African-American to signify both African descent and the African contribution to American culture." The term also implies "the connection between art and politics, specifically between literary acts of citizenship...on the continents of America and Africa"(p. xiii).

19. Critics of African literature and orature need to remind themselves that the bond between concept (signified) and sound-image or speech-sound (signifier) in onomatopoeic words/signs is not "arbitrary." The onomatopoeic word naturally suggests what it signifies; signifier and signified are, indeed, similar. This reminder is particularly relevant to any assessment of the onomastic and onomatopoeic language of "talking" drums. For a discussion of the constant use of, as well as the implications of using, "onomatopoeia, culminating in the richly onomatopoeic 'language' of 'talking' drums in [the] concluding chapter" of Cameron Duodu's The Gab Boys, see my "'Where Freedom is Absent Politics is Fate': A Critical Evaluation of...The Gab Boys," in The Novel and Politics in Africa, ed. U. Edebiri (forthcoming).

20. Cited by Costanzo di Girolamo, A Critical Theory of Literature (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), p. 79. Lord and Ong betray a peculiar commitment to the much-publicized etymology of "literature" [and the "literary"] from lit[t]era.

21. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd edition (New York: Harcourt, 1977), p. 22.

22. Margolin, "Conclusion," pp. 181-182.

23. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press [paperback], 1980), p. 60. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

24. John Callahan adds an "African-American" perspective to Bloom's "American" and "eloquence, the inspired voice." Callahan notes, for example, that "eloquence has a range of Emersonian meanings for [Ellison's] Invisible Man," alludes to Emerson's literary kinship to Frederick Douglass in the latter's "eloquence as a writer" and, in a sentence which brings together his range of references, the critic states:

> Like Emerson's *writing* on eloquence--like [Frederick] Douglass, [Abraham] Lincoln, and [Mark] Twain, Emerson was a preeminent public performer who infused the written with the spoken word--[Ralph Ellison's] Invisible Man's epilogue calls his potential participatory audience to action.

See Callahan, *In the African-American Grain*, pp. 155, 169, 182. For Harold Bloom's [own] reference to the "Emersonian" in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, see *Ralph Ellison*, edited with introduction by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea Hse., 1986), p. 5.

25. Armah, *The Healers* (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 2, 3.

26. Okara, *The Voice* (London: André Deutsch, 1964), p. 110.

27. Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 4. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

28. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 137.

29. Hans Jauss, "Theses on the Transition from the Aesthetics of Literary Works to a Theory of Aesthetic Experience," in *Interpretation of Narrative*, p. 147.

30. Doubrovsky, *The New Criticism in France*, trans. D. Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 106.

31. Cf. my "Point of View and Narrative Strategy in. . .*A Grain Of Wheat*," *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 17, 1(1987): 2-3.

32. For a concise discussio[illegible] "the call-and-response pattern" in African-American [illegible]-songs, spirituals, blues, and its manifestation in Jean Toomer's Cane, for instance, see Barbara Bowen, "Untroubled Voice: Call and Response in Cane," in Black Literature & Literary Theory, pp. 187-203. Bowen acknowledges her indebtedness to Robert Stepto and Sherley A. Williams (pp. 188, 189, 202). And for a broader discussion than Bowen's, see, for example, Callahan, In the African-American Grain, 1988.

33. Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 18-19. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

34. Gurnah, "Bossy," in African Short Stories, eds. Chinua Achebe and C.L. Innes (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 49.

35. Kibera, "The Spider's Web," in African Short Stories, p. 69.

36. Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 64.

37. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 88-89.

38. Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 144-145.

39. Di Girolamo, A Critical Theory of Literature, p. 66.

40. J.P. Clark, "Our Literary Critics," Nigeria Magazine 74(1962): 80.

41. Attributed to Randall Jarrell; cited by Henri Peyre, "On the Arrogance of Criticism," in The Analysis of Literary Texts, ed. R.D. Pope (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press, 1980), p. 6.

42. Lindfors, "The Blind Men and the Elephant," African Literature Today (ALT) 7(1975): 53.

43. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 43. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

44. Lindfors, "Armah's Histories," ALT 11(1980): 86.

45. I am grateful to Professor Kenneth J. Fielding, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, for drawing my attention to this.

46. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), pp. 156-157.

47. Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Octagon Bks., 1977), p. 4.

48. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 213.

49. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 147.

50. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Granada, 1981), p. 16.

51. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 40.

52. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th edition (New York: Holt et al., 1981), p. 200.

53. Bloom, *Map*, p. 3.

54. Gates, "The Blackness of Blackness," p. 296.

55. Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," *Morning Yet...*, p. 123.

56. Walter Allen, Preface to *The English Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 11.

57. Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 122.

58. Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 80.

59. Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 122.

60. Chinua Achebe, Interview with Anna Rutherford, *Kunapipi* 9, 2(1987): 5.

61. The point about different but related traditions is exemplified in the juxtaposition of Laurence Sterne's assertion that "'Writing, when properly managed,...is but a different name for conversation'" and Chinua Achebe's extensive use of "the I[g]bo...*art* of conversation" [my emphasis] in his writing. The characteristic colloquialism or conversational tone in either Sterne or Achebe may not be *functionally* different; but there is a world of difference between Achebe's Okoye or Obierika and Sterne's Shandy or Yorick. That difference is not merely one of color or time: different societal support systems, competing communication networks, and contrasting "traditions" sustain a Shandy, on the one hand, and an Okoye, on the other. See Walter Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 77; and Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 5 for citations.

62. I feel obliged to defend my use of "'critical' fiction" against the manipulation of the term in American criticism and critical theory. Frank Lentricchia puts the Paul de Man-J. Hillis Miller position this way: "One can only 'read,' which is to say, 'interpret,' which is to say, create metaphors, which is to say create one's own 'literature.'" Thus, "the difference between criticism and literature" is denied. (Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, p. 315.) The reader/critic can pick and choose from an assortment of de Man-Miller "critical fiction"; but for brevity and characteristic coding, J. Hillis Miller's "Ariadne's Thread," in Interpretation of Narrative, pp. 148-166 provides a good example.

"The difference between criticism and [fiction]" is exactly what Armah draws Charles Larson's attention to in "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction." I do not deny that difference. And neither do Soyinka, Aidoo and Achebe. The "'critical' fiction" which these writers and this student of African literature subscribe to is the one whose author, conscious of his/her own efforts to break new ground, to do something different with the novelistic form, "teaches" the reader how to read, and the critic how to interpret, him/her.

63. Armah, The Healers (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 2.

64. Atta Britwum, review of Armah's The Healers, ASEMKA 5(1979): 138.

65. Achebe, Morning Yet..., p. 71.

66. Cf. Henry Gates's relation of Mikhail Bakhtin's "'double-voiced' discourse" and "'inner dialogization'" to Afro-American literature in "The Blackness of Blackness," pp. 294-296. For a restatement of Gates's "'double-voiced'" argument, see The Signifying Monkey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 110-113.

67. Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 38.

68. Ama Aidoo, "No Saviours," in African Writers on African Writing, ed. G.D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 17.

69. Armah, Why Are We So Blest? (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp. 162, 261-262.

Chapter Two

1. Josiah Uguru, "Ayi Kwei Armah Breaks His Silence--Somewhat," *New African*, June 1987, pp. 12, 13.

2. Armah, "The Lazy School of Literary Criticism," *West Africa*, 25 February 1985, p. 355.

3. Armah, "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction," *ASEMKA* 4(1976): 1-14; "The Caliban Complex:1," *West Africa*, 18 March 1985, pp. 521-522; and "The Caliban Complex:2," *West Africa*, 25 March 1985, pp. 570-571.

4. Robert Fraser, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah: A Study in Polemical Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1980). Derek Wright's *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: The Background to the Novels* is forthcoming. Those who have been following Wright's spate of essays on Armah, published between 1985 and 1988, may have already had a taste of what is to come. See, for example, "Armah's Ghana Revisited," *International Fiction Review*, 12, 1(1985): 23-27; "Flux and Form: the Geography of Time in *The Beautyful Ones*," *ARIEL*, 17, 2 (1986): 63-77; "*Fragments*: the Akan Background," *Research in African Literatures*, 18, 2(1987): 176-191; and "Ritual Modes and Social Models in African Fiction: the Case of Ayi Kwei Armah," *World Literature Written in English*, 27, 2 (1987): 195-207. Wright sets the stage for his forthcoming book on Armah in a recent essay, "Critical and Historical Fictions." "Robert Fraser's *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*," writes Wright,

> is still to date the only book-length attempt at an overview...of Armah's fiction. It is a penetrating and provocatively argued work.... It is also, in places, a careless book.... [T]he confusion of the perspectives of Teacher and the man, and of Baako and Juana, in Fraser's chapters on the first and second novels is...a clear case of the critic failing the author. The most obvious obstacles, however, are raised by Fraser's reading of the last-published novel, *The Healers*.

See Derek Wright, "Critical and Historical Fictions: Robert Fraser's Reading of...Armah's *The Healers*," *English in Africa*, 15, 1(1988): 71, 72.

5. Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," *The Wound and the Bow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 38.

6. Achebe, "Africa and Her Writers," in *In Person*, ed. Karen Morell (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975), pp. 13,

14. Subsequent page references to In Person, preceded by IP where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

7. Yankson, "The Beautyful Ones...: An Anatomy of Shit," [Cape Coast University, Ghana] Dept. of English Workpapers I (1971): 25-30.

8. McEwan, Africa and the Novel (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1983), p. 96.

9. Jones, rev. of The Beautyful Ones, African Literature Today (ALT) 3(1969): 55.

10. Ama Aidoo, "No Saviours," in African Writers on African Writing, ed G.D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 16, 17.

11. Fraser, The Novels of...Armah, p. 15.

12. Kofi Owusu, rev. of Fraser's The Novels of...Armah, ALT 13(1983): 238.

13. Fraser, The Novels of...Armah, p. 42.

14. Armah, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 103. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

15. Ralph Ellison, Prologue to Invisible Man, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage Bks., 1982), p. 3. And see Alan Nadel, Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1988), pp. 1-26 for a discussion of what the critic describes as the "origins of invisibility."

16. Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 172, 567.

17. Harold Bloom, Introduction to Ralph Ellison, ed. H. Bloom (New York: Chelsea Hse., 1986), p. 5.

18. Soyinka, Foreword to Opera Wonyosi, Wole Soyinka: Six Plays (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 298, 300.

19. Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 130.

20. Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 11.

21. Henry Gates, Jr., "The Blackness of Blackness," Black Literature & Literary Theory, ed. Henry Gates, Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 315.

22. Kofi Owusu, "Armah's F-R-A-G-M-E-N-T-S," *Callaloo* 11, 2(1988): 361-370, particularly 365-369.

23. Doubrovsky, *The New Criticism in France*, trans. D. Coltman (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 46.

24. Speech delivered at Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852. Rpt. in *Blackamerican Literature: 1760-Present*, ed. Ruth Miller (Beverly Hills, Ca.: Glencoe, 1971), pp. 137-150. Frederick Douglass' speech was delivered against the backdrop of American internal slave-trade and the Fugitive Slave Law. Without political freedom himself, Douglass had been asked to deliver "a Fourth of July Oration" commemorating the seventy-sixth year of the American Declaration of Independence. By presenting "the slave's point of view" on such an occasion, Douglass treated his audience to a diet of "scorching irony..., withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke."

Slavery is employed as trope and/or motif in Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1974). One of Modin's most vivid boyhood memories is the day his class "went on the excursion to Christiansborg Castle [Accra, Ghana]" where, during the slave-trade, slaves were kept before their voyage on the open sea (pp. 75-79). Later, Modin notes that "there are no visible chains," "[t]he physical walls stand unused now"; "but the carnage continues all the same"(pp. 160, 161). "The assimilated African"(p. 84) is the modern-day "'factor, the slave dealer...bargaining with...Europeans about the price of ...slaves'"(p. 78). Like his predecessor, the *évolué* is himself "an eater of crumbs in the house of slavery" (p. 84). "Our history," concludes Modin, "continues the same. Horrible thought"(p. 160). And if this "history" is "told" in a novel which bears the title of a *Sunday Times* "'article on [America's] Thanksgiving'"(pp. 97, 99), then the reader has to be alerted to "scorching irony" and "withering sarcasm."

25. Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," *The Common Reader*, 2nd Series (London: Hogarth, 1932), p. 258.

26. Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp. 96, 97. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

27. Roland Barthes, "What is Criticism?," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1972), p. 257.

28. Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," p. 259.

29. Fraser, *The Novels of...Armah*, p. 48.

30. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, Revised Edition (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 229.

31. Fraser, "The American Background in *Why Are We So Blest?*" *ALT* 9(1978): 41.

32. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Sc. I, l. 76.

33. Fraser, "The American Background," p. 41. In *The Novels of...Armah* (1980), the "black buck" of the earlier essay reappears as "some virile primitive (who will be, by definition, black)" (p. 55).

34. Cf. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, pp. 566-567:

> The very act of trying to put it all down has confused me and negated some of the anger and some of the bitterness. So it is that... I denounce and defend.... I condemn and affirm, say no and say yes, say yes and say no.... And I defend because in spite of all I find that I love.... I *have* to love. I sell you no phony forgiveness,... but too much of your life will be lost, its meaning lost, unless you approach it as much through love as through hate.

35. Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 14.

36. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Signet Bks., 1966), p. 140.

37. Conrad *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 37.

38. The brutal suppression of the Maji-Maji revolt is the subject of Yusuf Kassam's poem, "Maji Maji." The [*mzee*-] persona recalls

> "The Germans--"...:
> "Yes, they came--with guns, to be sure--
> Many guns."
> ....
> "They fired [their] bullets...."
> He [the *mzee*] looked up,...
> And with an unsteady swing of his arm, he said,
> "Dead, we all lay dead."
> ....
> Finally,... he sighed,
> "The Germans came and went,
> And for many long years
> No drums beat again."

Yusuf O. Kassam, "Maji Maji," in *Poems of Black Africa*, ed. Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 203.

The British were as vicious in dealing with the so-called "Mau Mau 'rebellion'" of the 1950s in Kenya, British East Africa, as the Germans had been brutal in suppressing the Maji-Maji revolt of 1905-1907 in Tanganyika [Tanzania], German East Africa.

39. Henry Gates, Jr., "The Blackness of Blackness," p. 298.

40. Cf. "You said I would never understand. I understand, Naita, wherever you are. I understand"(p. 33); "I did not go searching for her, Naita"(p. 167); and

> 19 October.
> Last night a frightening thing happened, Naita. You will blame me and call me a fool for not ending the friendship [with Aimée]..., but let me tell you everything. (p. 193)

41. Ama Aidoo, Introduction to The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (New York: Collier, 1969), p. vii.

42. Gates, "The Blackness of Blackness," p. 299.

43. Charles Dickens, Bleak House, eds. Ford and Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 38, 39, 93.

44. W. Blake, Jerusalem, in The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, Newly Revised Edition, ed. D. Erdman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), p. 153: Chap. 1, Plate 10, l. 20.

45. Armah, The Beautyful Ones, p. 79.

Chapter Three

1. See Obi Maduakor, "Interpreting *The Interpreters*," *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writing* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), pp. 81-109; Kofi Owusu, "Interpreting *The Interpreters*: The Fictionality of...Soyinka's Critical Fiction," *World Literature Written in English* 27, 2(1987): 184-195; and Eldred Jones's note "Interpreting *The Interpreters*," *Bulletin of the Association for African Literature in English* (*BAALE*) 4(1966): 13-18.

2. Juliet Okonkwo, "The Essential Unity of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*," *African Literature Today* (*ALT*) 11(1980): 110, 111; Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, Revised Edition (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 203; and Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka*, Second Edition (London: Evans, 1978), p. 1. Subsequent page references to Okonkwo's essay are incorporated into the text.

3. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 115.

4. Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (New York: Third Press, 1974), pp. 160, 163. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by *SOA* where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

5. Soyinka, *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (London: Arrow Bks., 1985), p. 120.

6. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp. 230, 231.

7. Owen, Preface to *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 31.

8. Owen, "Strange Meeting," *Collected Poems*, p. 35.

9. Soyinka, "*Après la guerre*," *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London: Collings/Methuen, 1972), p. 84.

10. G. Frankau, "Poison," in *Poetry of the First World War*, ed. Maurice Hussey (London: Longman, 1971), p. 153.

11. Soyinka, *The Man Died*, p. 242.

12. Maduakor, *Wole Soyinka*, pp. 116, 117. Cf. Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, pp. 210-211; Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1979),

p. 281; and Edgar Wright, rev. of Season of Anomy, ALT 8 (1976): 117.

13. Soyinka, Madmen and Specialists, in Wole Soyinka: Six Plays (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 278.

14. Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," in Black Literature and Literary Theory, ed. Henry Gates, Jr., (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 49.

15. Maduakor, Wole Soyinka, pp. 113-114.

16. Ibid., p. 140.

17. T.S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, in Selected Poems (London: Faber, 1973), p. 11.

18. Kofi Owusu, "Interpreting The Interpreters": 187.

19. In his essay "What is Criticism?" Roland Barthes observes that "it appears possible...to develop an entire literary criticism starting from the two rhetorical categories established by [Roman] Jakobson: metaphor and metonymy." Barthes, Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1972), p. 256. The "possib[ility]" of that observation is taken for granted in the 1980s. See, for example, Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 99, 157, 167-168 in particular. And for instances of the application of "the two rhetorical categories...: metaphor and metonymy" to African and Afro-American literatures, see Kenneth Harrow, "The Poetics of African Littérature de Témoignage," in African Literature Studies, ed. Stephen Arnold (Washington,D.C.: Three Continents, 1985), pp. 135-149, particularly p. 142+; and Barbara Johnson, "Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God," in Black Literature & Literary Theory, pp. 205-219. While I appreciate and acknowledge the insights provided by these critics, my reading of Soyinka has not given me cause to conclude that preference is given to metaphor and metonymy at the expense of other tropic and rhetorical figures. In this chapter, then, I discuss metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche as important but certainly not exclusive "rhetorical categories" in Wole Soyinka's system of signification.

20. Maduakor, Wole Soyinka, p. 148.

21. Soyinka, Shuttle, p. 49.

21

22. What I refer to as "circumstance" is what Taiila calls "destiny":

> 'It is strange' Ofeyi said, 'but she herself [Taiila] thinks in terms of little else but destiny.... Our encounter at the airport lounge. Your [Demakin's] happening along at the same moment. She weaves all the strands in a[n]...accommodating mesh.' (*SOA*, p. 101)

23. Soyinka, *The Man Died*, p. 182.

24. Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 230.

Chapter Four

1. Alice Walker defines "womanist" as a

> black feminist or feminist of color.
>
> ....
>
> A woman who loves other women....Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist.
>
> ....
>
> Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.

Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1983), pp. xi, xii.

2. Barbara Rigney, "'A Wreath Upon the Grave,'" in *Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. J. Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984), p. 81.

3. Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1986), pp. 1, 2; Adelaide Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford* (London: Frank Cass, 1986). The term "feminist" may be controversial in its application to Adelaide Casely Hayford and to "African" and "Victorian" contexts, but Mrs. Casely Hayford's commitment to "'the neglected under-privileged girls of [her] race'"(p. 152), her impatience with "'[her] own people'" who took too long a time to get "'*accustomed to native leadership*'" and her conviction that "'a country cannot rise above the level of its womanhood'"(p. 192) mark her

> clearly [as] a most unusual woman--for her time anywhere.... Her educational and personal philosophy was well ahead of her time. (p. 204)

4. Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 278.

5. Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (New York: Third Press, 1974), pp. 181, 184, 187, 188. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

6. It appears to be the case that African male writers, negritudinists and non-negritudinists alike, cannot help but apostrophize the voiceless female principle, abstraction, or essence like Mother Africa/Motherland, Earth Goddess, Mother Earth/Earth Mother, [Okigbo's] Mother Idoto, and so on. With the possible exception of Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and the Achebe of *Anthills of the Savannah*, however, these apostrophizing writers are notoriously deficient in creating credible fictional versions of

the women who gave birth to and nursed them, the girls they played and went to school with, and the young women they befriend, court, marry and call wives.

7. For contrasting readings of Iriyise's role in Season of Anomy, see, for example, Sylvia Bryan's "Images of Woman in Wole Soyinka's Work," African Literature Today (ALT) 15 (1987): 119-130. And cf. Carole Davies, "Maidens, Mistresses and Matrons: Feminine Images in Selected Soyinka Works," in Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, eds. Carole Davies and Anne Graves (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1986), pp. 83-86.

8. M. Ellmann, "Blanche," in Criticism and Critical Theory, p. 101. Subsequent page references to Ellmann's essay are incorporated into the text.

9. Eldred D. Jones, ed., Women in African Literature Today, 15 (London: Currey; Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1987). Author, essay title, and page references to this volume, preceded by ALT 15 where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

10. S. Oyekunle, "'Beyond Nationalism,'" West Africa (WA) 19 Sept. 1983, p. 2168.

11. K. Petersen, "Four Days in Sweden," WA 9 June 1986, p. 1212.

12. Rosemary Clunie, "'Writing is Power'[: Interview with Nawal el Sa'adawi]," WA 18 Aug. 1986, p. 1736.

13. Charlotte Bruner, "A Decade for Women Writers," in African Literature Studies, ed. Stephen Arnold (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1985), p. 218.

14. Ibid., pp. 218-219.

15. Rigney, "'A Wreath Upon the Grave,'" p. 81.

16. It is gratifying to note that the editor [and associate editor] of ALT 15 pay tribute to Bessie Head, and Ngambika is dedicated to Mariama Bâ.

17. Rigney, "'A Wreath Upon the Grave,'" p. 81.

18. See, for example, Bernard Braxton, Women, Sex and Race (Washington, D.C.: Verta, 1973); and cf. Mineke Schipper, "Mother Africa on a Pedestal," ALT 15: 35-54. The notion that "women's studies are (like Third World Studies) a 'fad'" has been documented by Adrienne Rich in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 136.

Also apposite to our general discussion is Rich's essay in the same text, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia (1978)," pp. 275-310.

19. Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Glasgow: Collins, 1985), p. 53. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

20. Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 37.

21. Armah, The Beautyful Ones (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 37.

22. Ngugi, Decolonising the Mind (London: Currey, 1988), p. 64.

23. Ibid.

24. Roscoe, Mother is Gold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 75, 76.

25. Rigney, "'A Wreath Upon the Grave,'" p. 75.

26. Ibid.

27. Rich, Foreword to On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, p. 13; Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating (New York: Dutton, 1974), p. 26; Achebe, Morning Yet On Creation Day (New York: Anchor, 1975), p. 100.

28. Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 231.

29. Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 183.

30. Griffiths, "Chinua Achebe: When Did You Last See Your Father?," World Literature Written in English 27, 1(1987): 25.

31. Nabokov, Strong Opinions (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), p. 115.

32. Allen, The English Novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 352.

33. Soyinka, Season of Anomy, p. 172.

34. Cf.: "There's...an awareness on the part of black Americans to have their own standards in art.... It's...that they want to say, 'Now this is what...we value; you take

it or leave it'"[emphasis added].
Interview with Ama Aidoo, in *African Writers Talking*, eds. Duerden and Pieterse (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 20.

35. Ama Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy* (London: Longman, 1977), p. 123. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by *OS* where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

36. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 151.

37. Carl Bain et al., eds., *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, 4th Edition (New York: Norton, 1986), pp. 667, 668, 669.

38. L. Johnson, "Sisters of Anarcha," in *African Literature Studies*, p. 241.

39. H.L. Gates, Jr., Introduction to *Our Nig*, Second Edition (New York: Vintage Bks., 1983), pp. lii, lv.

40. Bain et al., eds., *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, p. 667.

41. Maud Ellmann, "Blanche," p. 100.

42. Johnson, "Sisters of Anarcha," p. 233.

43. M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Holt, 1981), p. 119.

44. Joseph Skerrett, Jr., "Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, eds. M. Pryse and H.J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 193.

45. S. Okechukwu Mezu, "Poetry and Revolution in Modern Africa," in *African Writers on African writing*, ed. G.D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 93-94.

46. Wole Soyinka, "O Roots!," *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London: Collings/Methuen, 1972), p. 2.

47. Wole Soyinka, "From A Common Back Cloth," *American Scholar*, 32 (1963): 396.

48. Awoonor, "Tradition and Continuity in African Literature," in *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka*, ed. Karen L. Morell (Seattle: Univ. of Washington, 1975), p. 144.

49. "Zimbabwe Book Fair," WA 7 Sept. 1987, p. 1741; and see my essay, "'Where Freedom is Absent, Politics is Fate,'" in The Novel and Politics in Africa, ed. U. Edebiri (forthcoming).

50. Rigney, "'A Wreath Upon the Grave," p. 74.

51. When Alice Walker links "Blackness" or "Color" to [Western] feminism she comes out with "Womanism," the term most appropriate to my discussion of Our Sister Killjoy. Carole Davies's reaction to the thrust of Katherine Frank's "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel" reinforces Walker's position:

> For example, [Frank's] questions about whether "gender or race is the most significant defining characteristic of a writer" is already answered. For Black/African feminists never make that distinction. It is not a question of either/or, but one of an acceptance of BOTH and the balances and conflicts that go with that twin acceptance.

Carole Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism," in Ngambika, p. 13.

52. For an important difference between "Otis Redding's version of 'Respect'" and Aretha Franklin's, see Sherley A. Williams, "The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry," in Chant of Saints, eds. M.S. Harper and R.B. Stepto (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 124.

53. Anozie, Structural Models and African Poetics (London: Routledge & Paul, 1981), p. 31.

54. Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, p. xi.

55. Clunie, "'Writing is Power'[: Interview with el Sa'adawi]," p. 1735.

56. Armah, The Beautyful Ones, p. 67.

57. Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 152. And cf. The Interpreters (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 224.

Where my argument makes it necessary, the original publication dates for this and other novels are incorporated into the relevant portions of the text.

58. Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 133-134.

59. For a brief discussion of the processes of "de- and re-coding" in Armah's second novel, see my "Armah's F-R-A-G-M-E-N-T-S," Callaloo 11, 2(1988): 366, 369.

60. Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 183.

Chapter Five

1. Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 13. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by TFA where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

2. Achebe, No Longer at Ease (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 49-50. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by NLAE where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

3. Achebe, Morning Yet On Creation Day (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1975), p. 102.

4. Achebe, Preface to Arrow of God, Second [Revised] Edition (London: Heinemann, 1980). Page references to this edition of the novel, preceded by AOG where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

5. Griffiths, A Double Exile (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), p. 33.

6. Achebe, Anthills of the Savannah (London: Heinemann [Hardback], 1987), pp. 96-97. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by AOS where appropriate, are incorporated into the text.

7. Cf. Nadine Gordimer, The Black Interpreters (Johannesburg: SPRO-CAS/Ravan, 1973), p. 54:

> The themes chosen by the new black poets [in South Africa] are committed in the main to the individual struggle for physical and spiritual survival under oppression. 'I' is the pronoun that prevails, rather than 'we,' but the 'I' is the Whitmanesque unit of multi-millions rather than the exclusive first person singular.

8. N. Farah, "A tale of tyranny [: review of Anthills]," West Africa 21 Sept. 1987, p. 1828.

Farah's otherwise perceptive review-essay contains a number of typographical and factual errors. For instance, John Kent ("Mad Medico") is not a "doctor" as the reviewer claims (Farah, p. 1829). Achebe's narrator notes that "Mad Medico's proper name is John Kent.... He is of course neither a doctor nor quite exactly mad"(AOS, p. 55). John Kent is a hospital administrator. The delegation from Abazon lodge at "Harmoney Hotel"(AOS, pp. 120, 128) not "Harmony Hotel"(Farah, p. 1830). Achebe would want his readers to remember that there is nothing harmonious about this hotel: it is "a sleazy establishment" where a lot of dirty money can be presumed to change hands. The critic has no more right to "correct" "Harmoney" than he has "correcting" Ayi Kwei Armah's "beautyful." Finally, and more importantly, it is not Colonel Johnson Ossai who takes over "the helm of the state"(Farah, p. 1831); it is rather the Chief of Staff, Major-General Ahmed Lango (*AOS*, pp. 213, 218). Rumor has it that Col. Ossai "is missing"; Capt. Abdul Medani thinks he is dead: "'perhaps Colonel Ossai is in the cooler, somewhere'"(*AOS*, p. 221).

9. Cf. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, pp. 6-7:

> Obi Okonkwo was indeed an only palm-fruit. His full name was Obiajulu--'the mind at last is at rest'; the mind being his father's.... [The father] who, his wife having borne him four daughters before Obi, was naturally becoming a little anxious.... He had called his fourth daughter Nwanyidinma--'a girl is also good.' But his voice did not carry conviction.

10. Farah, p. 1828.

11. Kofi Owusu, "Writers, Readers, Critics and Politics," *West Africa* 28 April 1986, p. 882.

12. Henry James's theory and practice uphold the overwhelming need to dramatize. His *Notebooks* record how "reading [Henrik] Ibsen's...*John Gabriel*[*Borkman*]...FINALLY AND FOREVER" made him "realize...that the *scenic* method is [his] absolute, [his] imperative, [his] *only* salvation." Again and again James underlines his commitment to the "really dramatic" and to "concrete action." See *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, eds. Leon Edel and L.H. Powers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 167, 166, 172.

To the critic of African literatures, what may be more important than browsing through James's *Notebooks* is the realization that a direct and immediately accessible local tradition demands of storytellers that they dramatize, embellish and, in the process, give new life to the re-telling of familiar stories/tales. And there is an African-American connection to all this. The concluding paragraph of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* comes to mind: "Tea Cake...could never be dead until [Janie] herself had finished feeling and thinking. *The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall*"[my emphasis]. Recalling the end of *Their Eyes...*, John Callahan notes how Janie's "'thought pictures' become present in Hurston's written words." Such "thought pictures" come readily to Toni Morrison's characters: "'Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture.'" "Usually," we read later, "[Sethe] could see the picture right away of what she heard." For citations, see Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 286; Callahan, In the African-American Grain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 119; and Morrison, Beloved (New York: Plume, 1988), pp. 36, 69.

13. Soyinka, Foreword to Opera Wonyosi, in Wole Soyinka: Six Plays (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 296.

Achebe's Sam is better educated than the average military dictator. Thus, while he may be less obviously "repellent and vicious," he is potentially a more dangerous "freak" than Amin, Bokassa or Ishmael Reed's Sam. Reed's Sam--President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam of Haiti--"could not do malice with style":

> I [PaPa LaBas] don't follow, malice with style?
> Yes, LaBas, certainly as a matter of course, there are to be political prisoners but not whole families randomly massacred in prison as Sam did. (Reed, Mumbo Jumbo [New York: Bard/Avon, 1978], p. 152.)

The new breed of sophisticated military dictators like Achebe's Sam, who are capable of "malice with style," can also manipulate public opinion. Such "freaks" massacre "whole families" and rape the mind[s] of the body politic.

14. Anthills makes explicit references to "'Mother Idoto'"(p. 101), "password" and "crossroads"(p. 114). And so Achebe's "witnesses," Christopher Oriko (through nomenclature) and Ikem Osodi (described as "'one of the finest [poets] in the...English language'"[p. 62]), may very well embody different aspects of Christopher Okigbo. The late poet is put on trial in Ali Mazrui's The Trial of Christopher Okigbo, a novel whose needlessly elaborate trial conceit and ideological scaffolding are very much the political scientist's. Achebe's less obtrusive trial metaphor is a novelist's comment on the ambiguity that defines our assessment of the poet-activist. For Achebe the essayist's thoughts on Mazrui's "Trial," see Morning Yet..., p. 89.

15. Soyinka, The Interpreters (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 10.

16. Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," in The Common Reader, Second Series (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 259.

17. Achebe, Interview [with Anna Rutherford], Kunapipi 9, 2(1987): 5.

18. Achebe, Morning Yet..., p. 89.

19. Callahan, In the African-American Grain, p. 182.

20. Ibid., p. 190.

21. Ibid., p. 184.

22. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p. 41.

23. Kofi Owusu, "Armah's F-R-A-G-M-E-N-T-S," *Callaloo* 11, 2(1988): 366.

24. Armah, *Why Are We So Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 102.

25. Ama Aidoo, Interview with Maxine McGregor, in *African Writers Talking*, eds. Duerden and Pierterse (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 23.

26. Achebe, *Morning Yet...*, p. 103.

27. Ibid., p. 67.

28. At a Nigerian National Merit Award Lecture given at Sokoto on 23 August 1986, Achebe observed that "[o]ur ancestors created their different polities with myths embodying their varying perspectives of reality. Every people everywhere did the same. The Jews [for example] had their Old Testament."
Chinua Achebe, "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?," rpt. in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 116.

29. J.B. Sykes, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Sixth Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 274.

30. See Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 134.

31. Kofi Owusu, "Interpreting *The Interpreters*," *World Literature Written in English* 27, 2(1987): 191-192; and see E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 18.

32. Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press [paperback], 1980), p. 3.

33. "Nearly all of Tiv dancing," writes Hagher, "engage[s] in some form of social criticism or the other." In "The Role of Dance In Tiv Culture," I.H. Hagher discusses "dance as social criticism," "dance as historical documentation and enlightenment," and "dance as agent of political expression" among other roles. See *Nigeria Magazine*, 55, 1(1987): 26-38.

In *The Gab Boys* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), Cameron Duodu's characters are appreciative of the role of ["talking"] drums in traditional Akan society:

> 'You will hear...idiots talking about "the dictatorial, feudal rule of...chiefs." But the chiefs were subjected to abuse...on their own drums; they were told there had been others and there would be others.' (p. 199)

And see Kofi Anyidoho, "Mythmaker and Mythbreaker: The Oral Poet as Earwitness" and Kwesi Yankah, "The Making and Breaking of Kwame Nkrumah: The Role of Oral Poetry," both in African Literature in its Social and Political Dimensions, eds. Eileen Julien et al. (Washington,D.C.: Three Continents, 1986), pp. 5-14 and 15-21 respectively.

34. Kofi Owusu, "Interpreting The Interpreters": 191.

35. Farah, "A tale of tyranny," p. 1831; S. Taylor, "Achebe strikes a harsh note [: review of Anthills]," New African, No. 241(1987): 52.

Chapter Six

1. The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 79-80.

2. Why Are We So Blest? (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 253.

3. Season of Anomy (New York: Third Press, 1974), p. 172.

4. Our Sister Killjoy (London: Longman, 1977), p. 80.

5. Anthills of the Savannah (London: Heinemann, 1987), p. 183.

6. An interesting case is presented by Soyinka's The Interpreters. Interpreting this text means interpreting the novel's interpreters who are involved in various processes of interpretation themselves. The secondary level of interpretation envelops the primary one. Not surprisingly, the average reader who, in this instance, is not given the liberty to enjoy the surface details of the story without the complication of "interpreting" it--because the story is [the] interpretation--dismisses the novel as "obscure" and "unreadable."

7. Achebe, No Longer at Ease (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 46.

8. Achebe, Anthills, pp. 202, 203.

9. Morning Yet On Creation Day (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1975), pp. 4-5.

10. Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," The Common Reader, 2nd Series (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 259.

11. Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 123.

12. Anthills, p. 124.

13. Armah, The Beautyful Ones, pp. 44-45.

14. Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 146-147. Subsequent page references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

15. Achebe, No Longer at Ease, pp. 155, 46.

16. Ibid., p. 155.

17. Arrow of God, Second Edition (London: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 32-33.

18. Things Fall Apart, p. 5.

19. The Growth of the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 77.

20. "Reading as a Process of Reconstruction," in Interpretation of Narrative, eds. M.J. Valdés and O.J. Miller (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1978), pp. 21-22.

21. See, for example, Charles Larson, The Emergence of African Fiction, Revised Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 34-5, 68; A. Roscoe, Mother is Gold pp. 123-28; Eustace Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel, pp. 77-8; Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm-Oil with which Achebe's Words are Eaten," African Literature Today (ALT) 1(1968): 3-18, and "The Blind Men and the Elephant," ALT 7(1975): 53-64. And cf. Gareth Griffiths, "Language and Action in the Novels of Chinua Achebe," ALT 5(1971): 88-105.

22. "The Blind Men...," p. 60.

23. "Language and Action...," p. 96.

24. "The Blind Men...," pp. 60, 64.

25. Griffiths, "Language and Action...," p. 93; Lindfors, "The Blind Men...," pp. 61-2.

26. "The Blind Men...," p. 61.

27. Achebe, No Longer at Ease, pp. 79-80.

28. Achebe, Morning Yet On Creation Day, p. 10.

29. Ibid., pp. 81-2, 90.

30. Gareth Griffiths, "Lost and Found," Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English Reviews Journal [Australia], 1(1985): 33.

31. Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 December 1817, in The Selected Letters of John Keats, edited with introduction by Lionel Trilling (New York: Farrar et al., 1951), p. 92.

32. Trilling, Introduction to The Selected Letters of... Keats, p. 29.

33. Myth, Literature and the African World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 61.

34. Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," The Common Reader, First Series (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 189.

35. Ibid.

36. Decolonising the Mind (London: Currey, 1988), pp. 71, 69.

37. Achebe, Anthills, p. 85.

38. Wole Soyinka, "O, Roots ," A Shuttle in the Crypt (London: Collins/Methuen, 1972), p. 2.

39. "Our Literary Critics," Nigeria Magazine, 74(1962): 80.

40. P.A. Egejuru, Towards African Literary Independence (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 106.
In the build-up to Egejuru's question and Achebe's answer, the latter says inter alia: "I don't think anybody reading my novels can be in any doubt that they are dealing with things from a different environment, culture, history, and [literary] tradition; from say,...European and American traditions. And this new dimension is...non-Western...,[it is] seeing the human predicament from a non-Western [artistic] standpoint. For instance, emphasis on community as opposed to the individual." [Ibid.]

41. Efua T. Sutherland, Foreword to The Marriage of Anansewa (Harlow, Essex: Longman Drumbeat, 1981), pp. v-vi, vii.

42. "Africa and Her Writers," in In Person, ed. Karen Morell (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975), p. 13; and in Morning Yet On Creation Day, p. 39.

43. Achebe, Morning Yet..., p. 75.

44. "Class Discussion," in In Person, pp. 52, 53.

45. Adewale Maja-Pearce, Introduction to Christopher Okigbo: Collected Poems (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. xix.

46. Achebe, Anthills, p. 118.

47. Anthills, p. 233; The Beautyful Ones..., p. 180.

48. "Don't Let Him Die," rpt. in Critical Perspectives on Christopher Okigbo, ed. Donatus Nwoga (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1984), p. 11.

49. Achebe quotes Okigbo as saying "'when I talk of looking inward...I mean turning inward to examine myselves. This, of course, takes account of ancestors.... Because I do not exist apart from my ancestors.'" See Morning Yet..., p. 44.

50. Cane, with new introduction by Darwin Turner (New York: Liveright, 1975), pp. 82, 109.

51. Atta Britwum, review of The Healers, ASEMKA 5(1979): 138.

52. Armah, The Healers (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 2, 3.

53. Anyidoho, Earthchild (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 1985), p. 43.

54. Ibid., p. 42.

55. Sherley A. Williams, Author's Note, Dessa Rose (New York: Berkley Books, 1987), p. ix.

56. Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 158, 136.

57. Ibid. [p. 136]

58. Achebe, Morning Yet..., p. 90.

59. A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 42, 43, 176, 60.

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